THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: A STUDY OF EIGHT MAJOR PLAYS

By

Delma Eugene Presley
A.B., Mercer University, 1961
B.D., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

1969

THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: A STUDY OF EIGHT MAJOR PLAYS

Approved for the Department:

David H. Hesla
Adviser

12 May 1969
Date

Accepted:

Chas. T. Lester
Dean of the Graduate School

May 12, 1969
Date

In presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I agree that the Library of the University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to copy from, or to publish, this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, or, in his absence, by the Dean of the Graduate School when such copying or publication is solely for scholarly purposes and does not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from, or publication of, this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without written permission.

Delma Eugene Presley
(signature)

NOTICE TO BORROWERS

Unpublished theses deposited in the Emory University Library must be used only in accordance with the preceding statement.

The author of this dissertation is:

Delma Eugene Presley
458 Staffordshire Road
Columbia, South Carolina 29203

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. David H. Hesla
The Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts
Emory University
Atlanta, Georgia 30322

Users of this dissertation not regularly enrolled as students at Emory University are required to attest acceptance of the preceding stipulations by signing below. Libraries borrowing this dissertation for the use of their patrons are required to see that each user records here the information requested.

Name of user	Address	Date	Type of use (Examination only or copying)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Elaborate personal expressions, as Gutman of Camino Real knows, are best spoken in private since public man has learned to distrust them. I shall be brief. Dr. James M. Smith, able director of the Institute of the Liberal Arts, provided a challenging interdisciplinary community of scholars. Dr. Floyd Watkins, my teacher of American literature, remains for me a model of disciplined scholarship. Thomas J. J. Altizer, a member of the Institute during my years of residence, taught me many valuable lessons about theological criticism. I wish to point out that my graduate adviser, Dr. David H. Hesla, not only helped plan my overall curriculum in literature and theology, but assisted me in countless ways both academic and personal; my criticism of Williams' works, particularly in the last chapter, grew out of Dr. Hesla's valuable suggestions. My dissertation committee also included Dr. Carl Bain and Dr. William Mallard. Their marginal comments were always helpful. My wife, in addition to sharing moments of frustration and accomplishment, aided in the preparation of the preliminary and final drafts. The resourceful Miss Helen Jordan, Reference Librarian of Columbia College, secured a number of research materials.

D. E. P.

For My Wife

Beverly B. Presley

Psalm 30:5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Chapter

I. THE HERO IN ISOLATION: TWO EARLY PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS 11
  The Glass Menagerie 11
  A Streetcar Named Desire 26
  Summary 40

II. FOUR EXPERIMENTS IN DESPAIR 44
  Summer and Smoke 47
  Cat on a Hot Tin Roof 53
  Camino Real 62
  Suddenly Last Summer 73

III. THE HERO'S ATTEMPT TO TRANSCEND DESPAIR 83
  The Night of the Iguana 84
  The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore 101
  The Theological Dimension of *The Night of the Iguana* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* 112

IV. THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE PLAYS 118

AN AFTERWORD REGARDING METHODOLOGY 139

NOTES 148

BIBLIOGRAPHY 160

INTRODUCTION

Many of Tennessee Williams' heroes are seekers who, as Tom Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie puts it, attempt "to find in motion what was lost in space." The pattern of the questing hero reveals itself throughout the works of Williams. Of course, it is a familiar pattern not only in the corpus of this particular writer, but in the literary tradition of mankind. The theme of the wandering hero, according to Northrop Frye, is an ancient literary form.[1] The Bible, for example, contains two examples of quest: Adam and Moses. Adam is expelled from the garden and, as Frye says, wanders throughout the "labyrinth of human history until he is restored to his original state by the Messiah."[2] Then there is Moses leading a dispersed people to the "Promised Land"--the perennial goal of Jewish history. In terms of the basic pattern, the hero's struggle is but a part of a larger conflict to be resolved when he completes his journey and discovers a redeemed society. Frye calls this a broad indication of the comic spirit.[3]

The theme of the quest is central to a great deal of the literature of the world. Williams' hero shares with Dante the search for paradise. Seen in the context of his total work, the early plays constitute what may be called Williams' Inferno. Quite appropriately, Williams uses as an epigraph for Camino Real the opening lines of Canto 1 of Dante's Inferno: "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost." Williams' hero pursues the goal of the great seekers in literature--Odysseus, Aeneas, and Don Quixote--and his obstacles are often psychological or theological in nature. While there is an identifiable quest motif in the works of Williams, it will be of little help simply to identify it. The significant factor is that this thematic structure both unifies his work and contains new approaches of interpretation.

After analyzing the situation from which the hero begins his voyage, this work will attempt to describe the nature of his goal. In works written since 1958 it is clear that the goal is found within a theological context. In this respect Williams' work is similar to Dante's Paradise and T. S. Eliot's later poetry and drama. Some of his heroes discover "something to mean God." Others try to establish a community. Still others express vague religious affirmations in an attempt to deny the reality of the harsh facts of life.

The theological developments apparent in the later works tend to create more problems than they solve. The sentimental cliches which ring with religious overtones are hardly the sort of affirmations one might expect the hero to speak. This aspect of the later works of Williams may suggest that he is basically more skilled at writing dramas which depict human frustration. On the other hand, it may be the case that a theological solution per se tends to detract from dramatic tightness and thematic unity. This problem, and others like it, will be discussed in depth in the fourth chapter.

The eight major plays by Tennessee Williams discussed in this dissertation appear to contain an overall thematic movement from the tragic to the comic. These terms--tragic and comic--will be used not in the strict Aristotelian sense, but in the phenomenological sense suggested by Northrop Frye. He takes into account the fact that world views have changed since Aristotle's day; thus the definition of tragedy should reflect this change. As we shall use the terms, "tragic" refers to the sort of work in which the hero becomes isolated. "Comic" refers to a work in which the hero is united either with a redeemed society or with a close-knit fellowship.[4] So Tom Wingfield of The Glass Menagerie can be described as living in "tragic" isolation, while T. Lawrence Shannon of The Night of the Iguana moves from isolation to that relatedness which is characteristic of the "comic." While this classification identifies Williams' works within the context of a larger body of literature, it is not the classification itself which really matters. Primarily, the task at hand is to read carefully the eight major plays and to describe the world of the hero therein.

A word of caution must be given about my use of the terms "isolation" and "community." They are used in the sense suggested by Northrop Frye in his discussion of tragedy and comedy. They are not intended to be understood strictly as theological terms. It would be incorrect to substitute "alienation" for "isolation" and "koinonia" for "community." (This is not to deny that "alienation" is a fact to be reckoned with in Williams' works.) There are indeed some distinct theological considerations which grow out of the hero's "isolation" as well as his search for "community." As we shall discover in the final chapter, the hero's understanding of his "community" is significant in that he is guilty of using it as a haven from problems he has been unwilling to face in his "isolation." These terms, therefore, simply point to very important aspects of the two genres. The theological dimension of the plays can be realized only in terms of the hero's encounter with his existence. The quest for community in many of the plays is fundamentally a desire to overcome a tragic existence characterized by isolation and despair.

A brief description of the scope of this particular study may be helpful at this point. Two early plays, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, unfold the nature of the hero's isolation. In the case of Tom Wingfield of *The Glass Menagerie*, isolation is the result of several factors, including the impersonal and meaningless world-views of those around him, as well as his own inability to understand his relationship to his surroundings. Tom does not know why he leaves home. His quest ultimately appears futile when it becomes obvious that his real desire is to experience the community which originally he forsook. Blanche Du Bois, heroine of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, wishes to end a life of wandering. Like Tom Wingfield, Blanche is isolated partially by those around her--especially Stanley Kowalski. She is crushed by Stanley who, himself merely sensual, cannot comprehend sensitivity. Blanche's isolation is not simply imposed by her environment, however. She experiences within herself the brutal forces which are active within her environment. Tom Wingfield is isolated from society yet he longs for meaning. Blanche Du Bois, searching for the same resolution of her problem, finds no help from either within or without. Ultimately the destinies of Tom and Blanche are the same: isolation.

For a period after these plays Williams wrote several dramas which may be called "experiments in despair." Summer and Smoke carefully explores the options of materialism and religion or the flesh and the spirit. Despair is the inevitable result since the conflict allows no adequate solution for the hero. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, despite an optional "happy ending" written reluctantly at the request of the director, Elia Kazan, is a drama in which hope cannot exist because of the undeniable truth of death.

The beginning of a major thematic development is evident in the controversial Camino Real.[5] The hero begins to see his way out of the dark maze of life. In the tradition of Dante, Williams depicts the dream of a modern seeker in which he triumphs over despair: "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" Another play revealing a similar thematic transition is Suddenly Last Summer. Here the author adopts methods commonly identified with the morality play. The familiar elements of a destructive society are presented once again, along with other themes such as homosexuality and cannibalism. This particular play underscores the malignancy of society which corrupts the spiritually healthy. The heroine, Catharine Holly, reports these truths, but she is considered insane by her peers. In this respect she is reminiscent of Blanche Du Bois of A Streetcar Named Desire. Yet, Catharine, unlike Blanche, is defended by a member of society. Dr. Cukrowicz, the psychologist, says at the play's end: "I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story is true."[6] Suddenly Last Summer represents, therefore, a thematic movement away from despair and toward a yet-to-be-defined hope.

Two recent works reflect the metamorphosis of the hero: The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. In these plays the hero finds a form of community. He no longer lives in isolation. He buttresses himself now with theological affirmations drawn from oriental and Christian traditions. The irony of the hero's redemption is that the religious ideology reduces his stature. This is only one of several difficulties inherent in Williams' theological vision.

The problems inherent in Williams' theological dimension cannot be recognized until one has surveyed the scope of his work. Chapters one through three, therefore, are useful primarily in terms of an objective explication of the plays. In the fourth chapter an attempt will be made to discuss the nature of Williams' theological vision. It will be pointed out that this vision is inadequate in terms of both theological meaning and dramatic effectiveness. The hero's ideology indeed relieves the basic anxiety of his life--alienation from mankind, the absence of God, and the reality of death. But this ideology forces Williams to relinquish his steady vision of existence which he demonstrates in his studies of isolation. This dissertation ultimately is an exploration of a larger problem shared by many modern dramatists who employ religious ideology as a solution for man's isolation. At least it is clear that the theological aspects which dominate Williams' later works reduce the stature of his hero and, in a broader sense, suggest that the author has lost a penetrating vision of existence.

This dissertation in the interdisciplinary area of literature and theology reflects an attempt to employ a critical methodology which grows out of the nature of the literature at hand. This is why, particularly in the explication of the texts in the first three chapters, little reference is made to theological issues which are not in the plays themselves. Whenever theological categories are introduced in the fourth chapter, they should be seen primarily as aids for understanding what Williams reflects in his works.

Probably one of the most unfortunate practices of theological criticism in the past has been the employment of external criteria in the analysis of literature. The most blatant example--indeed it has become a foil for literary critics--is Randall Stewart's use of "original sin" as the critical principle by which he judges major American writers.[7] Professor Nathan A. Scott, Jr., particularly in his earlier writings, tends to use Paul Tillich's "method of correlation" in a manner which makes modern literature a vast question to which Anglican Christian theology has many of the answers.[8] Mr. John Killinger has written a book based on the proposition that modern writers are often weak and irrelevant because, unlike Milton or Dante, they do not find within Christian doctrine a source of thematic structure.[9] There are other examples of the tendency to impose Christian theology as a valid critical principle in the study of literature. Perhaps the most succinct description of the weaknesses of such approaches came from Professor Herbert Weisinger at the first national "Conference on Literature and Theology" at Emory University in 1967. He summarized his disenchantment with a great deal of theological criticism by saying, "It seems that no really hard steps have been taken from literature to theology."[10] Weisinger appears to agree with R. W. B. Lewis, who argues that "In the actual study of a particular literary text, it [religion] probably ought to follow, and follow naturally and organically without strain--for the sake of the religion as well as the literature."[11] Professor Lewis never explains what he means by "naturally and organically," yet it appears likely that he prefers a criticism which springs from the work rather than from the canons of theology. This dissertation is written with this point of view in hope of discovering an approach to Tennessee Williams which acknowledges the theological nature of his vision as it is revealed in his works.

CHAPTER I

THE HERO IN ISOLATION: TWO EARLY PLAYS OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams' first Broadway production, The Glass Menagerie, is composed of memories recollected by the narrator, Tom Wingfield. When the play begins he already has left home because of specific frustrations including his family and his job. He is a would-be poet whose creative tendencies have been thwarted by the necessity of providing for his mother, Amanda, and his crippled sister, Laura. There is another member of the family who, although absent, is significant in the drama:

> There is a fifth character in the play who doesn't appear except in this larger-than-life-size photograph over the mantle. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distance; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town. . . .
> The last we heard of him was a picture post-card from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words--"Hello--Good-bye!" and no address.[1]

The portrait of the father, constantly visible to the audience, serves both as a reminder that the Wingfield's plight is related to the absent and negligent father, and as a prototype of the itinerant life which Tom finally embraces. At the end of the play, Tom says:

> I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire-escape for a last time and followed from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space-- (Scene vii).

A "2 by 4 situation" is Tom's way of describing his state of affairs. He feels "nailed . . . into a coffin." On the surface, Tom is trapped by everyday economics. Since his father's flight, he has been forced to serve as the breadwinner for his household. Each day he goes to a job at the Continental Shoemakers. In a violent argument with his mother, he shouts:

> You think I want to spend fifty-five years down there in that--celotex interior! with--fluorescent--tubes! Look! I'd rather somebody picked up a crowbar and battered out my brains--than go back mornings! I go! For sixty-five dollars a month I give up all that I dream of doing and being ever! (Scene iii)

His mother cannot understand that his present situation cramps his need for expression. Tom, fond of considering himself a "poet," embraces ways of life which are repulsive to Amanda; she especially disapproves the presence of a book by D. H. Lawrence in the Wingfield home. Lawrence's familiar emphasis upon instinct and expression is apparent in the conversations of Tom.

Tom's entrapment is more than a personal situation. He indicates that the world of the late '30's experiences at large what he experiences personally. The social order serves as a macrocosm of his own frustration; part of it, like Tom's, stems from economic conditions. Likewise, part of it is a general disillusionment for which change is the only solution. Speaking in the opening monologue, Tom relates:

> I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes, and so they were having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy.
>
> In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion.
>
> In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were disturbances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Saint Louis . . . (Scene i).

Much later in the play, after Tom has made the decision to join the merchant marine, he reflects once again that his actions are but a fragment of the vast shadow of change which awaited everyone--even the couples who sought escape in the "Paradise Dance Hall" across the alley from the Wingfield's apartment:

> Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash-pits and telephone poles. This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine, without any change or adventure.
>
> Adventure and change were imminent in this year. They were waiting around the corner for all these kids. Suspended in the mist over Berchtesgaden, caught in the folds of Chamberlain's umbrella--
>
> In Spain there was Guernica!
>
> But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows
> . . . .
> All the world was waiting for bombardments! (Scene v)

Having convinced the audience that his personal disillusionment is related to a universal malady, Williams' hero begins his voyage. But he does not know where he is going:

> I am tired of the movies AND I am about to move! . . . I'm starting to boil inside. I know I seem dreamy but inside--well, I'm boiling! Whenever I pick up a shoe, I shudder a little thinking how short life is and what I am doing!--whatever that means, I know it doesn't mean shoes--except something to wear on traveler's feet. (Scene vi)

The desperate circumstances of his existence, therefore, contribute to Tom's reason for leaving home. Yet his departure, as was the case with his father, is a flight from circumstances which he can neither understand nor correct.

Some attention should be given to the nature of the worlds upon which Tom turns his back. In the first place, there is the past-infected world of Amanda.[2] It is true that Amanda is aware of the importance of preparing for the future; "The future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it" (Scene v). Nevertheless, her rather consistent approach to life superimposes the past upon the present. Both Tom and Laura are amazed and frustrated at their mother's description of gentlemen callers and servants in the aristocratic days of her maidenhood in Blue Mountain, Mississippi. Amanda's solution--procuring a gentleman caller for Laura--finally brings about the total despair which pervades the ending of the drama.

The gentleman caller, Jim O'Connor, represents the illusory gilt of modern life--another world which Tom deserts. Jim embodies the American dream of a new technocracy:

> Because I believe in the future of television! . . . I wish to be ready to go up right along with it. Therefore, I'm planning to get in on the ground floor. In fact I've already made the right connections and all that remains is for the industry to get under way! Full steam--his eyes are starry knowledge--Zzzp! Money--Zzzp! Power! That's the cycle democracy is built on! (Scene viii)

Jim's vision is illusory. Actually, he is not about to move up to the top. Tom, in the opening of the sixth scene, indicates that Jim

> was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty. But Jim apparently ran into more interference after his graduation from Soldan. His speed had definitely slowed. Six years after he left high school he was holding a job that wasn't much better than mine (Scene vi).

Jim's interest in Tom, as Tom sees it, is selfish: Tom is "valuable to him as someone who could remember his former glory, who had seen him win basketball games and the silver cup in debating" (Scene vi).

While Jim represents both the mechanized and the mundane aspects of modern civilization, he also produces a solution for the plight of the Wingfields, particularly Laura. As Tom relates in the opening monologue, Jim is a symbol of an outside source of redemption. He is "that long delayed but always expected something that we live for" (Scene i). His techniques, garnered mainly from courses in public speaking and self-improvement, are designed to rid people of personal maladies such as the "inferiority complex." Even though Laura indicates no positive interest in Jim's ideology, she experiences with him as a person an ecstasy which lifts her momentarily from isolation. She dances, laughs, and enters into a deep, though brief, relationship with Jim. In this encounter Laura finds the closest thing to love she has ever experienced. She undergoes a metamorphosis. As the program notes indicate, "*In playing this scene it should be stressed that while the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life*" (Scene vii). Even Jim appears to be caught up in this experience of personal communion:

> LAURA: In what respect am I pretty?
>
> JIM: In all respects--believe me! Your eyes--your hair--are pretty! Your hands are pretty! [*He catches hold of her hand.*] You think I'm making this up because I'm invited to dinner and have to be nice. Oh, I could do that! I could put on an act for you, Laura, and say lots of things without being very sincere. But this time I am. I'm talking to you sincerely. (Scene vii.)

After they have danced and chatted playfully, the production notes instruct: "*Jim lights a cigarette and leans indolently back on his elbows smiling at Laura with a warmth and charm which lights her inwardly with altar candles*" (Scene vii). This scene has a magical quality about it. The mysterious mood emphasizes the appearance of a genuine sense of human community within the drama. (A similar effect is captured in the later plays, particularly in the scenes involving Shannon, Hannah and Nonno in *The Night of the Iguana*.)

Jim apparently is uncomfortable after his confession that he is attracted to Laura. He realizes that his prior commitments to a girl "named Betty" prevent realization of a lasting relationship with Laura. Jim promises so much yet he is incapable of delivering what only he could give. He cannot give himself. Perhaps this failure within itself comments upon the impotence of the modern world which Jim represents. Despite the hope envisioned by Amanda and Laura, Jim cannot relieve the frustrations of the Wingfields. Jim remains an outsider because other people have "strings" attached to him. Laura realizes this and "*the holy candles in the altar of Laura's face . . . [are] snuffed out. There is a look of almost infinite desolation.*" Laura and the lonely island of the Wingfields are left where they were--in the midst of hopelessness. The failure of Jim to fulfill the needs of the Wingfields brings the play to its climax of despair. Jim leaves. Tom joins the merchant marine and wanders aimlessly.

Laura's function in the drama is manifold. Her crippled condition represents the immobilizing frustration which plagues the Wingfield home throughout the play. Laura lives in a world of fantasy. The collection of transparent glass animals and the old phonograph records provide her with a constant escape from her terrifying present. The fact is, however, that there is no escape. Another function of Laura lies in the realm of sentiment. She serves as a tender memory of loneliness for Tom as he travels around the world. Perhaps Laura's greatest defect is her inability to initiate action. Instead of pursuing her stenographic course at Rubicam's business college, she throws up and walks in the park. Her response to despair, therefore, is as ineffective as Tom's flight.

When Tom finally leaves home, he leaves behind the boredom of his creativity-stifling job at the shoe factory as well as the world-views represented by both Amanda (the past) and Jim (contemporary America). Tom, however, leaves something else which is vital not only in this particular play but in subsequent plays as well: he forsakes Amanda's melodramatic version of "togetherness," although he is moved by it. Many critics have made the error of viewing Tom as a "type." Sam Bluefarb, for instance, describes Tom as a hard-shelled "rebel" who is "incapable either of empathy or sympathy."[3] Despite the furious arguments which run throughout the play between Tom and Amanda, a genuine sense of compassion exists between the two. In scene four, Tom and his mother break through the walls of bitterness between them. While "Ave Maria" plays in the background, Tom apologizes to Amanda for his tempestuous and sardonic outbreak of anger the night before:

> TOM: [Hoarsely] Mother. I--I apologize, Mother. [*Amanda draws a quick, shuddering breath. Her face works grotesquely. She breaks into childlike tears*] I'm sorry for what I said, for everything that I said, I didn't mean it.
>
> AMANDA: [Sobbingly] My devotion has made me a witch and so I make myself hateful to my children!
>
> TOM: *No*, you *don't*. (Scene iv).

Here certainly is a different view of Tom and Amanda. This is not the mother who incessantly nags her son for eating too rapidly. Neither is it the Amanda who censures him for reading and espousing the instinct-affirming writings of D. H. Lawrence. Here is the rare picture of Amanda as a compassionate mother, the same posture which she assumes as she comforts Laura in the play's closing pantomine. Critics have failed to notice the genuine tenderness of which Amanda is capable. Usually she is seen, as Joseph Wood Krutch writes, as "an absurd and pathetic widow" and "a pitiful and terrible old woman."[4] Richard B. Vowles calls her "vulgar and garrulous."[5] Signi Falk describes her as a "middle-aged southern belle, garrulous and silly, narrow and spinsterish in her attitudes toward life."[6] It is true that Amanda, at certain times, shows these characteristics. Nevertheless, Amanda is capable of genuine devotion and compassion, if not complete understanding.

In scene four, as mentioned above, she and Tom experience authentic reconciliation. She verbally recognizes that Tom is unhappy with his work at the warehouse. She realizes that both Tom and Laura are "special": "Both my children--they're unusual children! Don't you think I know it?" Tom, for the first time, speaks "gently" with his mother. Amanda confesses, "There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you!" Thus, the majority of the critics to the contrary, Amanda embodies a kind of tenderness which contributes genuine ambiguity to her role.

One of Amanda's speeches is prophetic of such plays as The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore; it occurs in the fourth scene when she says "In these trying times we live in, all that we have to cling to is each other." She seems to suggest that the Wingfields should form a functioning community which would shield them from the terror of their lives. Of course, her statement reflects the sort of sentiment characteristic of her melodramatic moments. She is whistling in the dark. Both she and Tom know that there is more to their despair--psychologically and socially--than the sort of illness which clinging "to . . . each other" could cure. Her melodramatic solution is rejected not only by herself but by Tom as well. The play is "honest" in this respect. The great failure in the later plays, as we shall see, is that cliches like Amanda's are accepted as truth.

Looking at The Glass Menagerie in the context of all of Williams' works, one of the most familiar characteristics is the grouping of Tom, Amanda and Laura. All three are misfits. Amanda is not paranoid, as the introduction reminds us, but her life is paranoia. She simply was not prepared for what life brought her. She married a man who gave her adventure and children but not security. Her response is a mixture of regret, love and terror. Laura's physical disability is the exterior sign of her interior life. From the beginning of the play, Laura is resigned to her condition. In this way she is the most realistic of any of the characters in the drama. Despite Amanda's objections, she readily admits that she is crippled. The menagerie is her way of escaping this deformity. Yet it is also her effective way of encountering things as they really are: she can see through her transparent animals and arrange them the way she likes; when one is broken, she is not distressed because life is like that--sometimes it is broken and distorted like Laura. As the introduction says, "She is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf." Tom, at home and on the job, does not "fit in." Even though he is capable of understanding his mother, he is at odds with her constantly because she is the one who forces him to assume the role of breadwinner for the family at a job which stifles his creative impulses. In the closing monologue, Tom reveals that, finally, he "was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box."

Seen against the background of Amanda, Laura, and Tom, the "gentleman caller," Jim O'Connor, is the "outsider." He is totally unlike the Wingfields simply because of his ordinary characteristics. Jim is a typical American: successful at football and, among other things, eager to adapt himself to the new technology; his goal is that described by many modern critics of society--to "fit in." The fact that Jim is incapable of relieving any of the frustrations of the Wingfields may be one of the stronger criticisms of modern society in The Glass Menagerie. One writer has suggested that Williams' criticism here is virtually the same as that leveled by such social critics as David Reisman and William Whyte.[7] In Williams' most recent creative effort, The Knightly Quest (1966), the character Jim is seen once again in Braden Pearce or Billy Spangler, both of whom are so committed to "the project" of the American government's defense department that they become human robots.

The Wingfields themselves compose a menagerie. Within their broken lives are scattered fragments of memories, desires and disappointments. Individually, Tom, Amanda, and Laura may be viewed rather objectively. However, they live together, and together they are a collective oddity. Perhaps it is because of this ambiguity that critics have had such a difficult time explaining the magic of Williams' first major work.[8] Amanda's despicableness is contrasted with her occasional ability to communicate with Tom. Tom's irresponsibility is contrasted with the genuine concern for Laura which haunts him at the play's end. Laura's escapism is contrasted with her occasional confrontation with reality. It seems that for every redemptive virtue, each of the Wingfields possesses a damning one. Yet, as Tom's closing lines attest, there is a basic "something" which pursues *him* long after his departure from home. He describes it as the memory of his sister: "Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be" (Scene vii). Thus the ambiguity which pervades the drama is intensified at the end.

The reader cannot know what happened to the Wingfields because Williams has not written subsequent plays about them. Nevertheless, he has written other plays about different individuals whose lives are reminiscent of the Wingfields. This thematic continuity is the subject of a critical essay by Robert Emmet Jones.[9] He maintains that Amanda of _The Glass Menagerie_ is the last manifestation of a single character who is revealed at certain stages of life in other plays of Williams; she is Alma Winemiller of _Summer and Smoke_, Cassandra Whiteside of _Battle of Angels_ and Blanche Du Bois of _A Streetcar Named Desire_. It is doubtful that an argument for such a precise development can be maintained consistently. At the same time, the life situations and issues are basically the same throughout Williams' dramas. Therefore, there is validity in studying the pattern of the hero and concomitant thematic developments in all of his plays.

A Streetcar Named Desire

Blanche Du Bois, heroine of A Streetcar Named Desire, is a seeker like Tom Wingfield. However, she experiences more dramatically the despair of her isolation. Speaking to her sister, Stella, she says, "I want to be near you, got to be with somebody. I can't be alone!"[10] Blanche arrives at her sister's small apartment in the French Quarter of New Orleans in a virtual state of emotional collapse. Solitude has driven her to the breaking point. A Streetcar Named Desire is the chronicle, if not a clinical case study, of the final collapse of Blanche Du Bois. At the end of the play her absolute isolation is revealed as she is taken to an insane asylum.

A Streetcar Named Desire depicts opposite world views much more strikingly than The Glass Menagerie. While The Glass Menagerie includes fairly well drawn representatives of the past (Amanda) and of contemporary America (Jim), these characters embody a great deal of ambiguity. But in A Streetcar

Named Desire, Stanley Kowalski and Blanche Du Bois have two distinctive outlooks whose diametrical opposition forms the core of the drama. Some critics have noticed this. Nevertheless, a great deal of misunderstanding has resulted from most critical discussions. Blanche often appears as a ridiculous sexpot who deserves to be raped by Stanley at the end of the play. Signi Falk describes Blanche as a "sentimental prostitute" who was originated by Williams for the purpose of eliciting "waves of titillated laughter" from the audience when she is overpowered by Stanley.[11] Falk approves of Mary McCarthy's critical judgement that the presence of "unsavory" characters (notably Blanche) in the play is indication of a "pervading smell of careerism."[12] George Jean Nathan's analysis of A Streetcar Named Desire voices Falk's and McCarthy's displeasure over the "strong language" in the drama. Nathan's review, however, is evidence that such criticisms fail to grasp the meaning of Williams' play:

> The play centers on a Southern school teacher whose youthful marriage ended in tragedy when her homosexual husband committed suicide, who has vainly sought nepenthe in miscellaneous sex, and who has become an incurable neurotic with delusions of grandeur. It develops her amatory life with her sister's husband and with the latter's crony. And it ends with her mental disintegration and deposit in an asylum. That it holds one's interest is not to be denied. But it holds it much as it is peversely held by a recognizably fixed prizefight or a circus performer projected out of what appears to be a

> booming cannon by a mechanical spring device. It is, in other words, highly successful theatre and highly successful showmanship, but considerably less than that as critically secure drama.[13]

Nathan's analysis overlooks an enormous amount of the script. The episode of Blanche's youthful marriage is only recalled; it is not a part of the action of the drama, even though the marriage helps one understand the mind of the heroine. To focus upon the sexual aberrations in the drama, of course, is to fail to capture the central images of despair and loneliness in the drama. A great deal of the despair grows not out of the psychology of the heroine but out of the nature of the world in which she lives.

German critics have recognized in _A Streetcar Named Desire_ the ideological, not simply sexual, opposition between Blanche and Stanley. Horst Frenz and Ulrich Weisstein summarize the German interpretation: "_Streetcar_ is, according to a number of critics, an illustration of the conflict between sensitive and primitive people exemplified in the relation between Blanche Du Bois and Stanley Kowalski."[14] Critics Falk, McCarthy, and Nathan to the contrary, the basic conflict in the drama is that which arises from the obvious clash between Stanley and Blanche. (This will be demonstrated later.) Only these two characters are developed in the drama; the others, including Blanche's sister, Stella, and Stanley's friend, Mitch, are developed only enough to emphasize the basic contrast that exists between the principals. Any serious study must notice the differences between the two antagonists.

In addition to the ideological conflict in the play, the epigraph suggests a struggle on another, more personal, level. The inscription is a stanza from Hart Crane's poem "The Broken Tower." Only one American critic, Benjamin Nelson, has noticed the epigraph. He merely uses a few phrases from the poem to describe Blanche's condition.[15] The pealing bell in the poem stands for the songs of the poet while the tower symbolizes the poet himself. The tower, however, is broken just as is the poet's self. In the stanza quoted by Williams, the poet speaks:

> And so it was I entered the broken world
> To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
> An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
> But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

Later in the poem is the line: "The angelus of wars my chest evokes." And again, "a tower that is not stone/ (No stone can jacket heaven)--but slip/ of pebbles--."[16]

An Indian literary critic, Professor Hari Singh, has drawn a parallel between Crane's poem and Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire:

> A self broken and disintegrating through

> clashing impulses, conflicts and tensions, racked by desperate choices and fondly, vainly holding on to each momentary impulse but unable to forge a unity, an organization that would lead to self-control and sanity--this is the theme of Hart Crane's "The Broken Tower" as also of Williams' Streetcar.[17]

If the epigraph is taken into consideration, more than the ideological differences between the two protagonists becomes significant. The "Angelus of Wars" within each character suggests that the play involves the universal ambiguity of human existence. Not only does Blanche strive against the encroaching bestiality of Stanley. She also strives against her own alcoholism, nymphomania and debauchery. It is a struggle between the flesh and the spirit.

Blanche Du Bois comes to her sister Stella's apartment in the French Quarter of New Orleans for the purpose of recovering what she has lost in the past few years in Laurel where she was sole guardian of the Du Bois estate, symbolically named "Belle Reve" (corrupted French for "beautiful dream").

> I stayed at Belle Reve and tried to hold it together! I'm not meaning this in any reproachful way, but all the burden descended on my shoulders. . . . I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it . . . I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body (Scene i).

Blanche's struggle was doomed economically. Much like Tom Wingfield who was forced to serve as a breadwinner, Blanche also was the victim of economic misfortunes:

> All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! . . . Death is expensive, Miss Stella! And old Cousin Jessie's right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep! . . . Belle Reve was his headquarters! Honey--that's how it slipped through my fingers! Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left a cent of insurance even? Only poor Jessie--one hundred to pay for her coffin. That was all, Stella! And I with my pitiful salary at the school. Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! I let the place go? Where were you! In bed with your--Polack! (Scene i)

Blanche Du Bois and Tom Wingfield both seek ways of escape from their "trap." Yet their goals are somewhat different. While Tom really does not know what he is looking for, Blanche attempts to realize what she knows to be her only means of salvation. She first turns to her sister, Stella. When Stella's world fails Blanche, she desperately looks for "outside" help in her messiah--Shep Hundleigh.

That Blanche is similar to Amanda Wingfield in that she relies upon the past as a means of salvation has been noted by Elia Kazan. His description would almost fit Amanda of The Glass Menagerie:

> We are shown the final dissolution of a person of worth, who once had great potential, and who, even as she goes down, has worth exceeding that of the healthy coarse-grained figures who killed her. . . . Blanche is an outdated creature, approaching extinction. . . .about to be pushed off the edge of the earth.[18]

Blanche's personal style and philosophy of life often reflect aspects of the old south. Her trunk contains finery, now outdated, which any belle might wear to a promenade. She is aware that her beauty is fading. She avoids being seen in the light; thus she covers the apartment's light bulb with a Japanese lantern. When the signs of her mental collapse become visible, her southern coquetry appears ridiculous and out of place. Nevertheless, there is a tragic dignity behind her silliness just as behind Amanda's shallowness there is occasional depth. Blanche possesses this dignity because she unflinchingly holds fast to a vanishing tradition. As director Kazan notes, she "is a social type, an emblem of a dying civilization, making its last curlicued and romantic exit. All her behavior patterns are those of the dying civilization she represents."[19] Kazan also indicates that the more he studies Blanche's character, "the less insane she seems. She is caught in a fatal contradiction, but in another society, she would work. In Stanley's society, no!"[20] Thus the name of the Du Bois' plantation, "Belle Reve," also describes Blanche's problem: the past--her "beautiful dream"--has not prepared her to face the harsh realities of Stanley's world.

Blanche's personal disintegration parallels the collapse of the home place. She symbolically embodies the unmistakable, gradual decay of her historical source of identity. She was fired from her teaching post because of advances made toward one of her students, a fifteen year old boy. She was told to leave Laurel because of her reputation among traveling salesmen and soldiers at the nearby army base. Her promiscuity reflects the point emphasized in the analysis of the play's epigraph: she experiences an unresolved inner tension between the flesh and the spirit. Williams' description of Miss Edith Jelkes in the short story, "The Night of the Iguana," fits Blanche perfectly:

> Miss Jelkes was a spinster of thirty with a wistful blond prettiness and a somewhat archaic quality of refinement. She belonged to an historical Southern family of great but now moribund vitality whose latter generations had tended to split into two antithetical types, one in which the libido was pathologically distended and another in which it would seem to be all but dried up. The households were turbulently split and so, fairly often, were the personalities of their inmates. There had been an efflorescence among them of nervous talents and sickness, of drunkards and poets, gifted artists and sexual degenerates, together with fanatically proper and squeamish old ladies of both sexes who were condemned to live beneath the same roof with relatives whom they could only regard as monsters.[21]

Blanche, undoubtedly, belongs to that type "in which the libido was pathologically distended." Norman J. Fedder's analysis suggests that her

> sexuality . . . is, paradoxically, a product of her delicate moth-nature--a neurotically defensive reaction to the suicide of her husband (for which she is partially responsible) and the

> loss of her aristocratic family's fortune and social position. She masochistically embraces, out of deep self-hatred, the very behavior she abhors.[22]

A proper understanding of Blanche, as stated earlier by Elia Kazan, must take into account that, on the one hand, she represents a sick and dying civilization built on a beautiful dream, and on the other hand, she engages in a desperate inner struggle of flesh vs. spirit. Because of this dual engagement, Blanche adopts a code of relativism in which she judges herself and the world not on the basis of what meets the eye, but on the basis of inward truth. This is why she tells Mitch: "I didn't lie in my heart." To Stella she says: "*Believe* I feel more than I *tell* you!" (Scene v.) Therefore, if Blanche is pathetic, as many American critics maintain, it is not primarily because of her surface idiosyncrasies; rather, she evokes pathos because of the schism within herself. This schism is most apparent in the encounter of Blanche with her polar opposite--Stanley Kowalski. A reading of the production notes is helpful at this point:

> Animal joy in his [Stanley's] being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying

> center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes up women at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them (Scene i).

The description of Blanche suggests a definite contrast:

> Her expression is one of shocked disbelief. Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than Stella. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner as well as her white clothes that suggests a moth (Scene i).

Immediately after Blanche encounters Stanley for the first time, she makes clear to her sister and Stanley's husband, Stella, that she is threatened by this savage force:

> He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! There's even something--sub-human--something not quite to the stage of humanity yet! Yes, something ape-like about him, like one of those pictures I've seen in--anthropological studies! Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is--Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle. And you--you here--waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking! His poker night!--you call it--the party of apes! Somebody growls--some creature snatches at something--the fight is on!

> GOD! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella--my sister--there has been some progress since then! Such things as art--as poetry and music--such kinds of new light have come into the world since then! In some kinds of people some tenderer feelings have had some little beginning! That we have got to make grow! And cling to, and hold as our flag! In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . don't--don't hang back with the brutes! (Scene iv.)

The references in Blanche's speeches and in the production notes to Stanley's bestial appearance should not obscure the fact that he is a "one hundred percent American." He has a responsible job as a salesman. In the eyes of card-playing budies, he is a successful and respected citizen. When Blanche refers to him as a "Polack," Stanley angrily replies: "I am not a Polack. People from Poland and Poles, not Polacks. But what I am is a one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack." His identity as a modern American is further enforced when he reminds his wife: "Remember what Huey Long said--'Every Man is a King!' And I am the king around here, so don't forget it!" (Scene viii.)

Blanche, as one critic has observed, is "essentially a spiritual figure."[23] Stanley, on the other hand, has no propensity for the spiritual. After spending a great deal of time in the apartment's only bathroom, Blanche chides Stanley with a paraphrase of Jesus' words in Luke 21:19: "Possess your soul in patience!" To this Stanley revealingly replies: "It's not my soul, it's my kidneys I'm worried about!" (Scene viii.) Not the things of the spirit but the needs of the flesh occupy Stanley's mind. Blanche and Stanley live in mutually exclusive worlds. Blanche's advocacy of the "more elevated" things of life is in vain. In a semi-conscious state, shortly before she is raped, she tells Stanley:

> Physical beauty is passing. A transitory possession. But beauty of the mind and richness of the spirit and tenderness of the heart--and I have these things--aren't taken away, but grow! Increase with the years! How strange that I should be called a destitute woman! When I have all of these treasures locked in my heart. [A choked sob comes from her] I think of myself as a very rich woman! But I have been foolish--casting my pearls before swine! (Scene x.)

Blanche's existence, like the passing aristocratic generation which she represents, cannot withstand the overwhelming forces of the rugged "American" brute, Stanley. The latter's domination is a victory of the flesh over the spirit. Blanche's last minute plea for outside help, in the context of Stanley's world, is incomprehensible:

> Operator! Operator! Never mind long-distance. Get Western Union. There isn't time to be--Western Union [She waits anxiously] Yes! I--want--to. Take down this message! "In desperate circumstances! Help me! Caught in a trap. Caught in--" Oh! (Scene x.)

Stanley's physical violation of Blanche is the culmination of a psychological or emotional violation which started the day she arrived at the Kowalski apartment. As Stanley says immediately before he overcomes Blanche: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning." The physical violence climaxes the action of the drama even though the last brief scene follows in which Blanche is assumed insane by the rest of the characters in the play. Stella cannot believe that Stanley raped Blanche; the tale seems so ridiculous that only an insane person could have told it. Thus Blanche is isolated without benefit of human pity.

Most of the people who inhabit the play are incapable of sensing that they are partially responsible for Blanche's catastrophe. The final scene thus depicts a world in which power and lust win out over life's more tender attributes. But the closing line introduces a note of irony which must not be overlooked. After Blanche is taken away, the production notes read: "The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fades away under the swelling music of the 'blue piano' and the muted trumpet." Then one of the card players says: "This game is seven-card stud." This ends the play on the cold and fortuitous note that life is similar to a poker game. Some unfortunate ones, like Blanche, lose all they have. This closing scene implies that Blanche's debacle has external origins.

Our reading of the play--particularly in view of the epigraph--suggests that Blanche's ultimate isolation is also the result of her unresolved inner conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

Summary

Isolation is the ultimate fate of the hero in these early plays of Tennessee Williams. A common critical error is to assume that the social and economic environment is solely responsible for the hero's isolation.[24] This overlooks the ambiguity of each play. There is a sense in which Tom's entrapment is the result of the past-infected world of Amanda and the modern American materialism of the "gentleman caller." At the same time these characters also embody other attributes in the thematic complex of The Glass Menagerie. Amanda often departs from the pattern of the past; her ability to understand her son, if only briefly, indicates that she is at least capable of the emotions of the heart. Jim O'Connor, as Tom surely knows, cannot save the Wingfields because of his inability to save even himself. Jim, therefore, is not only the champion of modern technology; he is also its ineffectual victim. Tom also shares in the ambiguity of the drama. He is a man of "action." Yet his "action" amounts to aimless wandering. What he finds in flight is not a solution to his problems, but the painful memory of his past. Tom's great misfortune is that, while he desperately wants to correct his situation, he is unable to understand what is wrong with it in the first place.

A Streetcar Named Desire contains somewhat less ambiguity than *The Glass Menagerie*. The very introductions of the characters Blanche and Stanley are indication enough that a violent conflict is about to be witnessed. Here are two polar opposites. Blanche is a representative of the fading aristocratic Southern heritage; her distended libido is a psychological aberration brought on by the collapse of her heritage. Blanche's catastrophe has other origins. The struggle which she experiences with Stanley is an outward manifestation of an inner struggle which she recognized after the suicide of her husband. Stanley, in addition to representing modern American materialism, contains a basic animality which opposes the refined and cultured side of Blanche. As Williams later develops the theme in *Camino Real*, it is a struggle between "violets" and the "rocks in the mountains." Quixote, at the drama's end, can say, "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" But such is not the case in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stones crush flowers. In this world, the "one hundred per cent American" Stanley Kowalski destroys Blanche Du Bois. Perhaps one of the most effective audio devices in the drama is the ascending sound of the jungle shortly before Blanche is finally isolated: "*The 'Varsouviana' is filtered into a weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the* jungle. Blanche seizes the back of a chair as if to defend herself." A Streetcar Named Desire leaves its heroine helpless in the hands of a hostile animal who is considered human and quite "American." If it is true that both Tom Wingfield and Blanche Du Bois share the common fate of isolation, it is also true that they hope for a solution. The hope does not imply realization, however, either with Tom or Blanche.

Both of these plays share the common characteristic of the failure of a "messiah." There is that glimmer of hope that an "outside" force will somehow redeem the unpleasant situation at hand; in both plays the agent fails. In The Glass Menagerie, the "messiah" is Jim. He is that "long delayed but always expected something that we live for." His failure to continue his redemptive relationship with Laura thrusts the drama into a sense of despair which pervades the final scene. Blanche Du Bois's "messiah," Shep Hundleigh, probably would not remember her. At any rate, she desperately tries to reach him or anyone who can help her as the animal, Stanley, begins to close in upon her.

Tom's memory of Laura and Amanda suggests that there is a hopefulness at the end of The Glass Menagerie. The isolation of Blanche, however, extinguishes hope. Her banishment signals the victory of Stanley Kowalski and the world he represents. As Blanche is taken away, Stanley comforts his wife, Stella: "Now, honey. Now, love, Now, now, love. [*He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse.*] Now, now, love. Now, love. . . ." The indication is that the world of Stanley Kowalski will be a safe and secure haven for the realization of animality by human beings.

These two major plays of Williams, written early in his career, contain the basic issues which will appear over and over again in later works. Some critics accuse Williams of lack of imagination because of his repetition of some of these issues.[25] Another way to view the recurrence is to see in it a steady preoccupation with fundamental problems of life. In these two early plays are themes which, although repeated in later works, will be subject to an attempted resolution through the comic vision of Tennessee Williams. If it is acknowledged that Williams' later plays tend to "prescribe" solutions for human isolation (a point argued in chapters three and four), then the analysis of isolation in these early plays becomes all the more significant.

CHAPTER II

FOUR EXPERIMENTS IN DESPAIR

In the two plays discussed in the first chapter, the hero discovers the inevitability of isolation. Tom Wingfield leaves home at the close of The Glass Menagerie to engage in an undefined quest. Blanche Du Bois is completely isolated when A Streetcar Named Desire ends. At the conclusion of each play, there still exists the unrealized potential of human compassion. Yet these two persons appear doomed to live in despair. The first two plays discussed in this chapter explore the depths of despair. The struggle is doomed before the action begins in Summer and Smoke and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Other dramas, Camino Real and Suddenly Last Summer, contain glimpses of hope beyond despair. The exact nature of this hope will not be clarified until The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, both discussed in the third chapter.

The four plays analyzed here reflect Williams' acute sense of what he once described as a "horror at the heart of the meaninglessness of existence."[1] These plays explore the "truth" about life which can only be arrived at in the face of death. With the exception of Summer and Smoke, it may be said that the major dramatic conflict arises when the protagonists realize the fact of death. Cat on a Hot Tin Roof has death as its central thematic concern. Solutions to the meaninglessness aroused by an awareness of death are hinted at in Camino Real and Suddenly Last Summer. In the context of each drama, it will be discovered, the solution amounts to little more than whistling in the dark. Instead of accepting death and its concomitant sense of meaninglessness, in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd, Williams' hero in Camino Real closes his eyes to existence and longs for a new order in which human sensitivity will triumph over life's brutal forces. However, let it be understood, these plays primarily explore the "truth" about existence. It is helpful to notice the hints and guesses at solutions in view of Williams' tendency to elaborate them in more recent dramas.

Another important development in these four plays is Williams' experimentation with a new technique. With the exception of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, these plays are overtly allegorical in nature. (German criticism of Williams' work is chiefly responsible for this insight, although Williams makes references to this new direction in his prefaces.) The struggle of the hero is symbolic of a larger conflict involving the universal values--"truth,""honor," "love," and "brotherhood." Professor Mark Schorer reminds us that technique or "style," so often overlooked in the critic's search for "larger" themes, is itself the "subject" and not merely the means of expressing the subject:

> The virtue of the modern novelist . . . is not only that he pays so much attention to his medium, but that, when he pays most, he discovers through it a new subject matter, and a greater one. . . . And the final lesson of the modern novel is that technique is not the secondary thing that it seemed to Wells, some external machination, a mechanical affair, but a deep and primary operation; not only that technique *contains* intellectual and moral implications, but that it *discovers* them.[2]

Williams' allegorical plays, seen in the larger context of his work, suggest that the author is discovering a new "subject matter": one in which religious meaning is substantial. It is important to notice this new theological dimension because the recent plays proceed in this direction as well.

Summer and Smoke

This drama, like A Streetcar Named Desire, depicts the futility of both the physical and spiritual resources of the hero and his environment. The main characters of this play, John and Alma, are involved in a dialectic of the physical and the spiritual which ultimately refuses synthesis. Joseph Wood Krutch has referred to Summer and Smoke as a "fable or allegory . . . whose characters are a bit . . . suggestive of the protagonists in some old morality play."[3] Because of this allegorical quality, most critics have found the play discontinuous with the corpus of Williams' works. German reviewers and academic critics have largely "dismissed it as a rough sketch by an author better represented by the finished work of his mature period."[4] Williams admittedly was experimenting in this play. In a letter to Irving Hoffman, columnist for Hollywood Reporter, he lamented that critics "don't stop to consider the playwright's need for a gradual ripening or development." He added that Summer and Smoke should be considered as a "transition work."[5] Despite the fragmentary nature of the work, it deserves attention because here Williams is pursuing a problem which, although unresolved in this drama, is finally resolved in later plays.

The play's beginning and ending have the same setting: a small park, underneath the overshadowing statue of an angel called "Eternity." When the play begins the two protagonists are children. When it ends they are adults. In the process of this transition, they have tried but failed to identify with each other. At the end of the drama they are at opposite poles. "Summer" refers to warmth, sensuality or flesh. "Smoke" refers to an ethereal or spiritual substance which eludes one's grasp. John moves from the flesh to the spirit and Alma (Spanish for "soul") moves from the spirit to the flesh.

The plot is simple enough. John Buchannan, son of a medical doctor, eventually assumes his father's role as the town's (Glorious Hill's) general practitioner. John lives next door to Alma Winemiller, daughter of a protestant minister. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Alma dreamed that one day John would become her husband. John did not dream of marriage. Rather, he desired to make physical love with Alma. Their moment of encounter finally comes one summer when John is home from medical college. He indicates an interest in Alma who responds later by inviting him to a literary league meeting at the rectory. John comes reluctantly and leaves abruptly when it becomes evident that he does not "belong" to such an "intellectual" group. From Alma's gathering of intellectuals, he goes to Rosa Gonzales, the voluptuous daughter of the proprietor of the Moon Lake Casino.

John's affair with the lusty Rosa repulses Alma. Soon she comes to the young doctor's office to convince him of the validity of her philosophy of the "spirit." After she has told John that he should seek "higher" things in life, John replies with a statement of his philosophy of the "flesh."

> Now listen here to the anatomy lecture! This upper story's the brain which is hungry for something called truth and doesn't get much but keeps on feeling hungry! This middle's the belly which is hungry for food. This part down here is the sex which is hungry for love because it is sometimes lonesome. I've fed all three, as much of all three as I could or as much as I wanted--You've fed none--nothing. Well--maybe your belly a little--watery subsistence--But love or truth, nothing but--nothing but hand-me-down-notions!--attitudes!--poses. . . . Now you can go. The anatomy lecture is over.[6]

Alma refutes him:

> So that is your high conception of human desires. What you have here is not the anatomy of a beast, but a man. And I--reject your opinion of where love is, and the kind of truth you believe the brain to be seeking!--There is something not shown on the chart.
>
> JOHN:
> You mean the part that Alma is Spanish for, do you?
>
> ALMA:
> Yes, that's not shown on the anatomy chart! But it's there, just the same, yes, there! Somewhere, not seen, but there. And it's that that I loved

> you with--that! Not what you mention! Yes, did love you with, John, did nearly die of when you hurt me! (Scene viii.)

With this exchange Alma and John reach a stalemate. Afterwards, Alma becomes less active and more melancholy than before. John, in the next few months, takes up his father's work at a fever clinic in a neighboring town. He proves successful in his efforts to eradicate the fever. In the process he also overcomes his passion for things of the flesh. When he returns to Glorious Hill, he has undergone a metamorphosis: Where he had been a rebellious affirmer of the body, he is now a "responsible" young man who is beginning to discover what Alma meant when she spoke of something "that's not shown on the anatomy chart." He confesses to her:

> But I've come around to your way of thinking, that something else is in there, an immaterial something--as thin as smoke--which all those ugly machines combine to produce and that's their whole reason for being. It can't be seen so it can't be shown on the chart. But it's there, just the same, and knowing it's there--why, then the whole thing--this--this unfathomable experience of ours takes on a new value, like some--some wildly romantic work in a laboratory! Don't you see? (Scene xi.)

Ironcially, Alma also has undergone a metamorphosis. She tells John:

> You talk as if my body had ceased to exist for you, John, in spite of the fact that you've just counted my pulse. Yes, that's it! You tried to avoid it, but you've told me plainly. The tables

> have turned, yes, the tables have turned with a vengeance! You've come around to my old way of thinking and I to yours like two people exchanging a call on each other at the same time, and each one finding the other one gone out, the door locked against him and no one to answer the bell! [*She laughs.*] I came here to tell you that being a gentleman doesn't seem so important to me any more, but you're telling me I've got to remain a lady. [*She laughs rather violently.*] The tables have turned with a vengeance!--The air in here smells of ether--It's making me dizzy. . . . (Scene xi.)

John and Alma, at the play's end, have exchanged value-systems, but far more significant than the philosophical translocation is the simple fact that they remain apart. All that is left is the future which, like the past, contains the certainty that they will not become reconciled. Summer remains apart from smoke. At the drama's end Alma, sitting underneath the statue "Eternity" in the park, propositions a traveling salesman. John, now a convert to the spiritual viewpoint, is engaged to marry a young lady of the community--a student at Sophie Newcomb college for women.

Summer and Smoke has major weaknesses. In the first place, the juxtaposition of sensuality and spirituality is far too obvious. This is not to say that the situation lacks dramatic possibilities. D. H. Lawrence, for example, used a very similar topic in *The Virgin and the Gypsy*. Professor Norman Fedder notes that Lawrence's treatment "is more subtle [than Williams'] in its exposition of a similar theme."[7] A second weakness is that the characters are not believable. Williams' characterization of John and Alma lacks the effective ambiguity which made Tom and Amanda of The Glass Menagerie understandable, if pathetic, characters. John's rapid conversion to Alma's earlier viewpoint is not convincing. Critic Benjamin Nelson has observed:

> When they finally begin to contemplate themselves rather than castigate each other, their plight should achieve a sense of poignant irony. But it does not. The individuals and the situation have now become so abstract that it is difficult to view the turnabout as anything more than a necessary device employed by the author to solve--but not resolve--their problem.[8]

Viewed in the context of all of Williams' major plays, Summer and Smoke lacks the concern for the "real" which was evident in earlier plays. The conflict of this drama is that of ideologies, not human beings. When allegory is successful it avoids this error.[9] It is important to notice the appearance of this unfortunate tendency, for it is dominant in several of Williams' more recent efforts.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof deals with the lives of the Pollits who live on a thriving Mississippi plantation. The head of the family, Big Daddy, is dying of cancer unknowingly. Big Mamma is a frantic busybody who refuses to face either the impending death of her husband or the sense of alienation between her sons, Brick and Gooper, and their wives, Margaret and Mae. Brick's wife, Margaret (the "Cat"), shares with Gooper and Margaret the desire to get a large portion of the Pollit estate when Big Daddy dies. Brick, unlike his brother and wife, cares nothing about the inheritance. His marriage with Maggie is on the rocks; they do not sleep together. The production notes describe him in this manner: "He has the additional charm of that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle."

There are three types of people in the play: The acquisitive (Big Mamma, Gooper, Mae, and Margaret), the disgusted (Big Daddy) and the detached (Brick). In a conversation with Brick, Big Daddy indicates his awareness of Big Mamma's fascination with material things. Having been to Europe recently on a "Cook's tour," he describes the countries he and Big Mamma visited as a

> great big auction, that's all it is, that
> bunch of old worn-out places, it's just a
> big fire sale, the whole rotten thing, and
> Big Mamma went wild in it, why you couldn't
> hold that woman with a mule's harness!
> Bought, bought, bought!--lucky I'm a rich
> man, yes siree, Bob, and half that stuff is
> mildewin' in the basement.[10]

Gooper, strictly practical, already has drawn up a will which, if Big Daddy signs it, turns over control of the entire estate to himself and his family. He reasons that Brick's alcoholism makes him incapable of managing fiscal affairs. Gooper's wife does everything within her power to impress upon Big Daddy that she and her husband are loyal and deserving of his favor. She arranges for her children to entertain their grandfather at every possible moment. Mae constantly reminds everyone that she has five children and "one on the way," while Brick and Margaret are childless. Margaret resents the plotting of Gooper and Mae, since she also would like to get as much of the inheritance as possible. Therefore she encourages her husband to assume a pose of responsibility. She wishes to demonstrate that Brick's side of the Pollit line will be continued; thus she continually pleads with Brick to make her pregnant. At the end of the play Margaret, unsuccessful in her pleas, falsely asserts that she is pregnant. Mae and Margaret, while greatly different in appearance, are materialists. Big Daddy notices this:

> BIG DADDY:
> That woman of yours has a better shape on her than Gooper's, but somehow or other they got the same look about them.
>
> BRICK:
> What sort of look is that, Big Daddy?
>
> BIG DADDY:
> I don't know how to describe it, but it's the same look.
>
> BRICK:
> They don't look peaceful do they?
>
> BIG DADDY:
> No, they sure in hell don't.
>
> BRICK:
> They look nervous as cats?
>
> BIG DADDY:
> That's right, they look nervous as cats.
>
> BRICK:
> Nervous as a couple of cats on a hot tin roof:
>
> . . . .
>
> BIG DADDY:
> Crap . . . I wonder what gives them both that look?
>
> BRICK:
> Well. They're sittin' in the middle of a big piece of land, Big Daddy, twenty-eight thousand acres is a pretty big piece of land and so they're squaring off on it, each determined to knock off a bigger piece of it than the other whenever you let it go. (Act II.)

This conversation between Brick and his father reveals not only their interpretation of the people around them, but the nature of the relationship between a father and his favorite son. Appropriately, they are the only characters who search for the truth about their lives. Big Mamma, Mae, Gooper and Margaret, all live by appearances. But Big Daddy and Brick attempt to explore reality. Both of them agree that reality is clouded by a basic untruthfulness or "mendacity." With the exception of his relationship with Brick, Big Daddy says that most of his relationships have been false ones.

> BIG DADDY:
> What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it! Don't you know that? I could write a book on it and still not cover the subject? Well, I could, I could write a goddam book on it and still not cover the subject anywhere near enough! ! --Think of all the lies I got to put up with!--Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have any idea of? Having for instance to act like I care for Big Mamma--I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now!--even when I laid her!--regular as a piston. . . . Pretend to love that son of a bitch Gooper and his wife Mae and those five small screechers out there like parrots in a jungle? Jesus! Can't stand to look at 'em! Church!--it bores the Bejesus out of me but I go!--I go an' sit there and listen to that fool preacher! Clubs!--Elks! Masons! Rotary!--crap! (Act II.)

Many critics have failed to see beyond the violence and sexual references in this drama.[11] A few, however, have noticed a fundamental search for truth at the core of the play.[12] Reviewer Roger Ashton, writing in the New Republic, argues:

> Mr. Williams in this play is interested in something . . . significant. . . . He is interested in what may and may not be said about the truth as a motivating force in human life. The play is thus less psychological than moral in orientation.[13]

The secondary truth which Big Daddy and Brick explore is the falseness of those around them. The primary truth finally discussed, however, is one which involves both Big Daddy and Brick. That truth is death: for Brick it is a spiritual death, the refusal to participate in life; for Big Daddy it is physical death. Brick informs him that the doctor's vagueness about his illness was part of a larger fabrication. Big Daddy does not have a "spastic colon." Rather, he is dying of cancer. In the words of Brick, death is the truth for Big Daddy. The irony of his knowledge of this fact is that it comes near the end of a conversation in which he has lectured to Brick on the importance of living life for its own sake:

> Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto. . . . (Act II.)

After he learns of his imminent death, Big Daddy registers his disgust with all who have lied to him: "CHRIST--DAMN--ALL--LYING--SONS OF--LYING BITCHES!"

Big Daddy is not the only one to learn of death.

Brick is made aware of the death of his own will to live. When the play begins, it will be remembered, Brick "has that cool air of detachment that people have who have given up the struggle." Part of the reason for his apathy lies in his awareness that his youth has vanished. He is left with the physical remains of what used to be the body of a successful athlete. Brick's problem, his reason for being "disgusted" with life, is that he has lost belief, not in God, but in himself:

> BRICK:
>
> A drinking man's someone who wants to forget he
> isn't still young and believing.
>
> BIG DADDY:
> Believing what?
>
> BRICK:
> Believing. . . .
>
> BIG DADDY:
> Believing what?
>
> BRICK [stubbornly evasive]:
> Believing. . . .
>
> BIG DADDY:
> I don't know what the hell you mean by believing
> and I don't think you know what you mean by believing,
> but if you still got sports in your blood, go back
> to sports announcing and--
>
> BRICK:
> Sit in a glass box watching games I can't play?
> Describing what I can't do while players do it?
> Sweating out their disgust and confusion in contests
> that I'm not fit for? Drinking a coke, half bourbon,

> so I can stand for? That's no goddam good
> anymore, no help--time just outran me, Big Daddy,
> got there first. . . . (Act II.)

Brick's passing from belief to disbelief in himself and his capacities as a man is only partially accounted for by his inability to participate in sports. Another reason, certainly more basic, is the air of mystery surrounding the nature of his relationship with Skipper, a fellow-athlete with whom he once shared an unusual bond of love and admiration. He tells Maggie early in the play:

> One man has one great good true thing in his
> life. One great good thing which is true!--
> I had friendship with Skipper. . . . Not love
> with you, Maggie, but friendship with Skipper
> was that one great true thing. . . . (Act I.)

Was this relationship homosexual in nature? Critic Eric Bentley assumes as much when he calls the drama "fatally incomplete" because Williams never "tells" the audience "whether homosexuality is something this individual can accept as the irrevocable truth about himself."[14] Brick's relationship with Skipper may or may not have been homosexual in nature. Professor Paul J. Hurley writes that "We may never know whether Brick is harboring homosexual impulses more powerful than those which psychologists tell us are common to most men."[15] Two things suggest possible homosexuality. In the first place, Brick and Maggie's bedroom is the same room which had been occupied previously by two homosexuals. Secondly, Brick's problem with alcohol began after he heard of Skipper's suicide. Nevertheless, it is never clear that homosexuality is involved. As Maggie says, "I know, believe me I know, that it was only Skipper that harbored even any unconscious desire for anything not perfectly pure between you two!" (Act I.) In the production notes, Williams indicates that the uncertainty about Brick's relationship with Skipper should be seen in the context of the larger search for "truth":

> The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem. I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent--fiercely charged! interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis. Some mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself. This does not absolve the playwright of his duty to observe and probe as clearly and deeply as he legitimately can, but it should steer him away from "pat" conclusions, facile definitions which make the play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience (Production Notes, Act II).

The play is a study of two kinds of death in the modern world. Life cannot continue in the cancer-ridden body of Big Daddy. There is no indication, despite Margaret's lie to the contrary, that life will continue in Brick's side of the family. Life will continue for Gooper and Mae and their offspring. But, as Big Daddy and Brick indicate in their search for the truth, the kind of existence embodied by these people is mendacious. The continuation of Gooper's materialistic species and the extinction of the life-affirming Big Daddy and the sensitive Brick confronts the reader once again with a theme dominant in A Streetcar Named Desire. The chief difference is that, whereas Big Daddy and Brick are already defeated before the drama begins, in A Streetcar Named Desire, Blanche is gradually and painfully defeated as the play progresses. Death is the truth which finally is affirmed in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

Camino Real

The play is intended not for reading but for viewing. Williams says that "of all the works I have written, this one was meant most for the vulgarity of performance."[16] Professor Esther Merle Jackson, a critic who has concentrated on dramaturgical elements in Williams' plays, points out that this play

> makes a definite break with the realist tradition, a departure more calculated than that of The Glass Menagerie, and even more radical than that exemplified in Summer and Smoke. . . . Camino Real, like other examples of Williams' work, illustrates the necessity for a new definition of form. Clearly, neither the Aristotelian definition, the Horatian imperative, the romantic concept, nor the realist law provides a satisfactory basis for judging such a play. Camino Real is not "drama" in the sense prescribed by previous laws. Measured by older concepts, it may be considered as "tableau," "lyric,""poetry" or "dance."[17]

Miss Jackson, continuing, indicates that the most fitting term for the play is "allegory," for "it is clear in Camino Real that Williams interprets the human dilemma in our time as the result of an extended moral crisis."[18] German critics often have referred to the play as a "sermon" and "morality play." Rudolph Grossmann, critic for Die Rampe, connects Williams' Camino Real with plays of the age of Baroque, an era in which religious and secular allegory flourished. Grossmann writes, "Seit alters her ist es das Grundprivileg des spanishen Theaters gewesen, das Leben als Traum, das Sein als Schein darzustellen und dabei Traum, Allegorie und Abstraktion in blutvollste Dynamikezu verwandeln."[19]

One immediate indication of the allegorical nature of the play is the title, Camino Real, which may be translated either as "Royal Road" or "the way of reality." This ambiguity, according to a discussion of German dramatic critics, contributes to the symbolical impact of the drama.

> The title is consciously supposed to enclose an ambiguity. If one expresses "Camino Real" in English, that means "the way of reality." If one expresses it in Spanish, then it means "Royal Road." . . . In this double meaning already lies hidden what Tennessee Williams wants to say. . . [It is] the road of the Spanish knights who conquered the land, but also the road upon which Christianity came to the West Coast of America. This, moreover, is the division of the play into sixteen stations . . . missionary stations. . . . Today, however, the old missionary way has become a street of industry of money, of tourist trade--a business reality.[20]

In addition to the possibilities of meaning implicit in the title, the reader should also notice the play's epigraph: "In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost." This sentence comes from Canto I of Dante's Inferno. The blocks of the Camino Real could be compared to the circles of Dante's hell. Kilroy's travels, like those of Dante, encompass all of life.

Each block of Williams' hell has characters who belong to the modern world. In this respect the play is quite similar to the Inferno. Williams concentrates completely upon the timeless struggle of human values, however, Dante's hell abounds with far more concrete references to contemporary individuals, popes, merchants, poets and politicians. Another important difference is that Dante went from the Inferno through Purgatory on his way to Paradise. Williams' protagonist in this drama, however, shares with the major characters a common fate of extinction rather than salvation. Professor Jackson describes it in this manner: "Camino Real represents such a road from life to death; its blocks are 'stations of the cross' in man's progression toward annihilation."[21]

Williams has described the world of this play in a foreword:

> More than any other work that I have done, this play has seemed to me like the construction of another world, a separate existence. Of course, it is nothing more nor less than my conception of the time and the world that I live in, and its people are mostly archetypes of certain basic attitudes and qualities with those mutations that would occur if they had continued along the road to this hypothetical terminal point in it.[22]

The major archetypes in the drama are Casanova, the eternal lover; Lord Byron, the romantic poet in quest of an ideal; Marguerite, a sentimental courtesan past her prime--the lady of camellia; Quixote, an idealist undaunted amidst sobering reality; and Kilroy, a symbol of independence, sincerity, success, and courage. Kilroy is the American Everyman. These characters live among five major symbols. The ever-present street cleaners who collect bodies in their trash cans signify death. The airplane "Fugitivo" represents the possibility of flight from the world. The "Terra Incognita" and its luxury hotel, "Siete Mares," symbolize another means of escape. The flop house, "The Ritz Men Only," opposite the stairs leading to "Terra Incognita," represents one feeble hope for the destitute males on the Camino Real. In the middle of the square is an arid fountain symbolizing the absence of vitality.

The play concerns the journey of an American Everyman, Kilroy, on the Camino Real. His voyage is part of the larger dream of a sleeping Don Quixote who is alone--Sancho Panza deserted him after he discovered this notation on their map: "the spring of humanity has gone dry in this place." Don Quixote refuses to flee. He stays because

> When so many are lonely as seem to be lonely, it would be inexcusably selfish to be lonely alone. . . . Yes, I'll sleep for a while and dream for a while against the wall of this town. . . . And my dream will be a pageant, a masque in which old meanings will be remembered and possibly new ones discovered, and when I awake from this sleep and this disturbing pageant of a dream, I'll choose

> one among its shadows to take along with me in the place of Sancho.[23]

Each block is introduced by the narrator, Gutman, whose position in the drama is much like that of the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's Our Town. Blocks one and two introduce the Camino Real. Two points are made: In the first place, the dry fountain symbolizes the spiritual texture of the entire community. Secondly, human compassion is virtually non-existent. This is made clear when Gutman censures Casanova who has repeated thewword "Hermano," the word for brother.

> Yes, the most dangerous word in any human tongue is the word for brother. It's inflammatory. --I don't suppose it can be struck out of the language altogether, but it must be reserved for strictly private usuage in back of soundproof walls. Otherwise it disturbs the population. . . . The word is said in public pulpits and at tables of council where its volatile essence can be contained. But on the lips of these creatures, what is it? A wanton incitement to riot, without understanding. For what is a brother to them but someone to get ahead of, to cheat, to lie to, to undersell in the market. Brother, you say to a man whose wife you sleep with!--But now, you see, the word has disturbed the people and made it necessary to invoke martial law. (Block Two.)

Before Kilroy's journey down the Camino begins, the characters--Jacques Casanova, Marguerite Gautier, and Lord Byron--unfold individual tales of desperation. Jacques and Marguerite are old and tired affirmers of the flesh.

They await the street cleaners after having made an unsuccessful attempt to board the "Fugitivo." While they await death they console each other. Lord Byron, on the other hand, leaves the Camino by way of the Terra Incognita. Before his departure, he admonishes Jacques and Marguerite not to give up hope.

Unlike Jacques and Marguerite, Kilroy is unwilling to accept the fate which the street cleaners bring. He questions openly the presuppositions of the Camino Real. Unlike Lord Byron, Kilroy refuses to flee by way of the Terra Incognita. Kilroy, the former boxing champion, wishes to meet his adversaries face to face. Before the confrontation takes place, however, Kilroy is stripped of all his belongings. He is forced to pawn his most precious possession--the golden gloves. The police beat him and force him to wear a clown's costume complete with blinking red nose. Such is the price to be paid by one who refuses to part with human dignity on the Camino Real. Mr. Harold Clurman, in a critical discussion of the play, describes the role of Kilroy:

> Kilroy is bewildered and innocent, seeking a haven in a world corrupt to the core, grasping for security and love in places where he can find nothing but humiliating adventures. The rich are smug and cruel; officialdom is heartless and blind; all, except the heroic poet who is willing to take action, shrink from the nobler exploitation of the spirit. Kilroy is doomed to die young because he is honest, ignorant,

> and without guile. His redeeming feature is aspiration--not without a touch of Puritanism and an unconscious idealism which makes him brother to other errant knights who have sinned, suffered, and still believe in the inherent magnificence of life.[24]

Kilroy, an archetype of the rugged individualist, continues to insist upon encountering his adversary in the flesh. He thinks that he can perhaps convert the street cleaners and the society which supports them. Block eleven shows Kilroy's attempt to teach one of the more insensitive inhabitants, Esmerelda the prostitute. Initially, she is incapable of understanding Kilroy's words about "sincerity" and "love." After a while, nevertheless, it appears that she is becoming aware of the human community. Near the end of the play, after Kilroy has been defeated and extinguished, Esmerelda indicates that she may have learned something from Kilroy. Her prayer indicates that she is one of the few residents on the Camino who have any compassion:

> God bless all con men and hustlers and pitch-men who hawk their hearts on the street, all two-time losers who're likely to lose once more, the courtesan who made the mistake of love, the greatest of lovers crowned with the longest horns, the poet who wandered far from his heart's green country and possibly will and possibly won't be able to find his way back, look down with a smile tonight on the last cavaliers, the ones with the rusty armor and soiled white plumes, and visit with understanding and something that's almost tender those fading legends that come and go in this place like songs not clearly remembered, oh, sometime and somewhere, let there be something to mean the word honor again! (Block Sixteen.)

Kilroy's fate is extinction by the street cleaners. He is subdued and taken to a medical institution where interns dissect him. It is discovered that the young fighter's heart is made of gold. Furthermore, a spiritual Kilroy is resurrected. Although his former body is ruined, the raised Kilroy carries beneath his arm his heart of gold. His redemption is completed when Don Quixote acknowledges Kilroy as his new companion:

> KILROY:
> The deal is rugged. D'you know what I mean?
>
> QUIXOTE:
> Who knows better than I what a rugged deal is! [*He produces a tooth brush and brushes his teeth.*] --Will you take some advice?
>
> KILROY:
> Brother, at this point on the Camino I will take anything which is offered!
>
> QUIXOTE:
> *Don't! Pity! Your! Self!* [*He takes out a pocket mirror and grooms his beard and moustache.*] The wounds of the vanity, the many offenses our egos have to endure, being housed in bodies that age and hearts that grow tired, are better accepted with a tolerant smile--like this--You see? [*He cracks his face in two with an enormous smile.*]
>
> GUTMAN:
> Follow-spot on the face of the ancient knight!
>
> QUIXOTE:
> Otherwise, what you become is a bag full of curdled cream--*leche mala*, we call *it!*--attractive to nobody, least of all to yourself! [*He passes the comb and pocket mirror to Kilroy.*] Have you got any plans?

> KILROY [*A bit uncertainly, wistfully*]: Well, I was thinking of--going *on* from--*here*!
>
> QUIXOTE:
> Good! Come with me.
>
> . . .
>
> The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!
> [*Quixote goes through the arch with Kilroy.*]
> (Block Sixteen.)

For the first time in the drama, the fountain is filled with water. The implication is that the Camino Real has been redeemed through the courage of Kilroy and the wisdom of Quixote.

William Faulkner once was asked his opinion about "writers from the South today." He mentioned two: William Styron and Tennessee Williams. Concerning Williams, he said that "A play called *Camino Real* . . . I think is the best. The others were not quite that good. . . . That's all I know of Williams. *Camino Real* was--it touched a very fine high moment of poetry, I think."[25] Even though Faulkner rarely functioned as a critic of any artist's work, his comments at this point describe the essence of *Camino Real*. The play, more than any previous work of Williams, is an attempt at poetry. Faulkner's enthusiasm to the contrary, the play is a failure as poetry. The poeticizing is hollow. The images are over-ripe. The author's literary self-consciousness both confuses and detracts even the most sympathetic reader.[26]

If the essence of the play is poetry and, because of this fact, results in failure, then it must be pointed out that the play, nevertheless, is visually effective. John von Szeliski explains: "No matter how heavily Williams' symbols rain down upon the audience, one must grant that he knows what is and is not humane. . . . His violent pictures . . . are flooded with a poetry which shows, by contrast, that to be humane is to be considerate and sensitive."[27]

There are severe weaknesses in Camino Real. One major problem is Williams' too simple reduction of complex literary figures such as Don Quixote and Lord Byron. Another limitation arises from Kilroy's sudden apotheosis after his death; this is pure *deus ex machina*. His literary self-consciousness leads to chaos: All at once the viewer is thrust into an incongruous symbolical environment of Dante, Cervantes, T. S. Eliot, Lord Byron, Spanish folk lore and Christian reminiscences. Too much weight rests upon sentiment. The clearest example of this is found in the closing lines: "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" The "comic" resolution of the play comes through the author's fiat and not through a dramatically believable resolution of the issues. This means that Williams by using sentiment in such a way, pronounces the play complete even if the reader or viewer mentally protests. This sentimentalism will become more dominant in the later plays where its misuse is observable on a much larger scale.

Suddenly Last Summer

This one act play of four scenes shares with Camino Real an unrealistic setting. Likewise, this drama has overt allegorical qualities. Professor Paul J. Hurley recently described it as a "morality play."[28] The description of the set for Scene One quickly establishes the mood:

> The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of the body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents, and birds, all of savage nature.[29]

The entire play builds up to a story told by Catharine Holly in the fourth scene. In the first scene is an extended conversation between the owner of the home and jungle-garden, Mrs. Venable, and a psychiatrist and brain surgeon, Dr. Cukrowicz. Mrs. Venable tells the doctor that she is willing to subsidize the experimental work at Lion's View State Hospital, if he will, in turn, perform a prefrontal lobotomy upon her niece, Catharine, who accompanied her recently deceased son, Sabastian, on his last journey. Mrs. Venable complains that Catharine's stories about events of that last summer are "a hideous attack on my son's moral character which, being dead, he can't defend himself from" (Scene i).

Mrs. Venable informs the doctor that for twenty-five years she and her son toured throughout the world for the three months of summer. During this period it was customary for Sebastian to write his annual "Poem of Summer." She reveals several things about her son. He was an effete bachelor in his forties who, as she puts it, looked twenty:

> It takes character to refuse to grow old, Doctor--successfully to refuse to. It calls for discipline, abstention. One cocktail before dinner, not two, four, six--a single lean chop and lime juice on a salad in restaurants famed for rich dishes. (Scene i.)

As far as she knew, he was "chaste." He demanded only "beautiful" people around him. In order to swim without being "contaminated" by the water of a public beach, he would take a boat a mile from shore before getting into the water. Mrs. Venable, constantly by her son's side, persuaded him to complete his poetry each summer. One incident stands out in her memory. She refers to an experience they had at Galapagos islands in the Encantadas (referred to by Melville[30]) where she and Sebastian saw the annual egg-laying of the giant sea turtles. Later they returned to see the eggs hatch and the gruesome spectacle of carnivorous birds devouring all but "a hundreth of one percent of their number." Mrs. Venable continues:

> Yes, well, now I can tell you without any hesitation that my son was looking for God, I mean a clear image of him. He spent that whole blazing equatorial day in the crow's-nest of the schooner watching this thing on the beach till it was too dark to see it, and when he came down the rigging he said "Well, now I've seen Him!" and he meant God.--And for several weeks after that he had a fever.

The doctor pursues her remarks about Sebastian's view of God:

> I can see how he might be, I think he would be disturbed if he thought he'd seen God's image, an equation of God in that spectacle you watched in the Encantadas: creatures of the air hovering over and swooping down to devour creatures of the sea that had had the bad luck to be hatched on land and weren't able to scramble back into the sea fast enough to escape that massacre you witnessed, yes, I can see how such a spectacle could be equated with a good deal of--experience, existence!--but not with God! Can you?
>
> MRS. VENABLE:
> Dr. Sugar, I'm a reasonably loyal member of the Protestant Episcopal Church, but I understood what he meant.
>
> DOCTOR:
> Did he mean we must rise above God?
>
> MRS. VENABLE:
> He meant that God shows a savage face to people and shouts some fierce things at them, it's all we see or hear of Him. Isn't it all we ever really see and hear of Him, now?--Nobody seems to know why. . . . (Scene i.)

This episode in Sebastian's life turns out to be most significant in view of Catharine Holly's account of his unusual death described in the fourth scene. It is this interpretation of

Sebastian's death which troubles Mrs. Venable. This is why she bribes the young doctor: a large donation for his clinic in exchange for a lobotomy on Catharine.

Mrs. Venable is not the only person who resents the reports of Catharine. Her brother and mother are most anxious because Mrs. Venable is withholding their share of Sebastian's estate until Catharine stops her "babbling." In the third scene, Catharine is confronted by her brother, George, and her mother:

> MRS. HOLLY:
> Catharine, darling. I don't know the full story, but surely you're not too sick in your head to know in your heart that the story you've been telling is just--too--
>
> GEORGE:
> Cathie, Cathie, you got to forget that story! Can't cha? For your fifty grand?
>
> MRS. HOLLY:
> Because if Aunt Vi contests the will, and we know she'll contest it, she'll keep it in the courts forever!--We'll be--
>
> GEORGE:
> It's in PROBATE NOW! And'll never get out of probate until you drop that story--we can't afford to hire lawyers good enough to contest it! So if you don't stop telling that crazy story, we won't have a pot to--cook greens in! (Scene ii.)

Quite against her will, Catharine has been a patient at an insane asylum since she returned home with her account of Sebastian's last summer. Now surrounded by Mrs. Venable, the doctor, her brother, mother and a hospital aide, Catharine is asked once again to recount the "true" story about Sebastian. In order to assure this, the doctor gives her an injection of "truth serum." The use of the drug is fitting at this point. Mrs. Venable demands that she hear her "truth"--that Sebastian was, indeed, the epitome of human perfection. Mrs. Holly and George desire their "truth," for this, they believe, will assure them of their portion of Sebastian's will. But the truth which Catharine gives, once the drug has been administered, is what she has said all along.

Catharine begins her description of the previous summer by indicating that Sebastian asked her to accompany him on his annual tour, this time to Italy, because Mrs. Venable had suffered a stroke. At first she enjoyed the excursion. Sebastian bought her new clothes and luggage. "He was affectionate with me, so sweet and attentive to me, that some people took us for a honeymoon couple until they noticed that we had--separate staterooms." She responded to his kindness, but Sebastian refused her. Soon she noticed changes in him. He had not written one word of his "Poem of Summer" and he grew "restless" and began to spend the afternoons on public beaches. He purchased Catharine a white lisle bathing suit which would become transparent when wet. She attracted young men whom

Sebastian personally entertained. She was procuring for him, just as Mrs. Venable had done unknowingly before her stroke made her unattractive. Sebastian considered people as things for private consumption. According to Catharine:

> Cousin Sebastian said he was famished for blondes, he was fed up with the dark ones and was famished for blondes. All the travel brochures he picked up were advertisements of the blond northern countries. I think he'd already booked us to--Copenhagen or--Stockholm--Fed up with dark ones, famished for light ones: that's how he talked about people, as if they were--items on a menu--"That one's delicious-looking, that one is appetizing," or "that one is not appetizing." (Scene ii.)

That Sebastian was a homosexual is part of the truth which Catharine reveals. The last part of her story, however, is the most offensive to Mrs. Venable. It seems that the day before they had planned to journey northward, they had lunch at a restaurant near the ocean. As they ate, hordes of dark and naked children swarmed around them and shouted for food as they put their fists in their mouths. Some of these children were those who were entertained by Sebastian on the beach. The situation made Sebastian ill. After they left the restaurant, he insisted on climbing a steep hill. Seeing the children rush after Sebastian, Catharine immediately ran for assistance. Meanwhile, Sebastian was overtaken by the screaming horde. Catharine relates the bizarre aftermath:

> --Waiters, police, and others--ran out of buildings and rushed back up the hill with me. When we got back to where my Cousin Sebastian had disappeared in the flock of featherless little black sparrows, he--he was lying naked as they had been naked against a white wall, and this you won't believe, nobody *has* believed it, nobody *could* believe it, nobody on earth could possibly believe it, and I don't *blame* them!--They had devoured parts of him. . . . Torn or cut parts of him away with their hands or knives or maybe those jagged tin cans they made music with, they had torn bits of him away and stuffed them into those gobbling fierce little empty black mouths of theirs. There wasn't a sound any more, there was nothing to see but Sebastian, what was left of him, that looked like a big white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses had been *torn*, *thrown*, *crushed*!--against that blazing white wall. . . . (Scene iv.)

Mrs. Venable immediately leaps from her chair and attempts to strike Catharine, shouting "Lion's View! State asylum, cut this hideous story out of her brain!" Then Mrs. Holly asks the Doctor to say something:

> DOCTOR [*after awhile*, *reflectively*, *into space*]: I think we ought at least to consider the possibility that the girl's story could be true. . . .

Like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, this play is basically a search for the truth about life.[31] In this instance the search involves an attempt to discover the facts about the life and death of Sebastian Venable. Even though her mother, brother, and Mrs. Venable protest, Catharine is adamant: "I can't change the truth, I'm not God" (Scene iv). Catharine's "truth," however, is unlike the "truth" of her mother and brother. For them, truth is what will give them their portion of Sebastian's will. For Mrs. Venable, the truth is that Catharine's account cannot be accepted as fact. The doctor's closing lines indicate that Catharine's story may be *the* truth about Sebastian, even though it is unacceptable to all but the doctor.

Suddenly Last Summer deals, in addition to the truth about Sebastian Venable, with another kind of truth. Catharine said earlier in the play: "I know it's a hideous story but it's a story of our time and the world we live in and what did truly happen to Cousin Sebastian in Cabeza de Lobo. . . ." (Scene iii.) In order to understand this "true story," it is necessary to recollect the incident at the Galapagos islands of the Encatadas. Mrs. Venable said that Sebastian discovered "God" when he saw the carnivorous birds devour the majority of the newly hatched turtles. This is central to Catharine's statement that she tried to "save" Sebastian:

> DOCTOR:
> From what? Save him from what?
>
> CATHARINE:
> Completing!-a sort of!-~~i~~*image*!--he had of himself as
> a sort of!--sacrifice to a! *terrible* sort of a--
>
> DOCTOR:
> --God?
>
> CATHARINE:
> Yes, a *cruel* one, Doctor! (Scene iii.)

This play demonstrates, according to Professor Paul J. Hurley, that a "daemonic vision of human nature may irredeemably corrupt the one who possesses that vision.[32] This thought may be extended to include Sebastian's vision of a demonic God, for it is truly a demonic God to whom Sebastian sacrifices himself. Sebastian, who viewed human beings "like items on a menu," is finally destroyed by human beings. The metaphors of homosexuality and cannibalism, according to Professor Hurley are used

> to emphasize as vividly as possible his belief that man may be destroyed by ignoring . . . the need for participation in society. Turning in upon oneself and away from the concerns of one's fellow man represents a sort of self-cannibalism; man may be consumed by his own inversion.[33]

This point of the drama is not simply that Sebastian actually died as Catharine said. It seems that the truth which she affirms is at the heart of the play. Despite the fact that her relatives consider her insane, she unveils the truth of the age in which she lives: man is alienated both from God and humanity. Over against Sebastian's vision of a cannibalistic God is Catharine's relatively simple affirmation: "Somebody said once or wrote, once: 'We're all of us children in a vast kindergarten trying to spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks!'" (Scene ii.) While she does not define her conception of God, she does speak about the need for human compassion. She describes humanity in the following manner: "A ship struck an iceberg at sea--everyone sinking--. . . . But that's no reason for everyone drowning for hating everyone drowning!" (Scene iv.)

Her understanding of love does not grow out of her conception of God. It is basically the same concept Don Quixote had expressed in Camino Real: "When so many are lonely as seem to be lonely it would be inexcusably selfish to be lonely alone" (Prologue). Catharine's rather categorical statements about humanity and compassion suggest that the problem of Sebastian (even with his complex demonic vision) can somehow be resolved by means of a childlike, if not childish, moral lesson. It is at this point, therefore, that Suddenly Last Summer exhibits Williams' failure once again to utilize allegory's unifying realism.[34] Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that if Williams' analysis of the human predicament is convincing, his barely visible solution now appears increasingly irrelevant.

CHAPTER III

THE HERO'S ATTEMPT TO TRANSCEND DESPAIR

Williams' optimism regarding his hero's ability to move beyond isolation to a state of community, from despair to hope, implicit in the works written since *Camino Real*, is explicit in the two plays discussed in this chapter--*The Night of the Iguana* and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. These plays are quite different from earlier ones such as *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in which the protagonists reveal the despair of their lives. In striking contrast, these later works depict the hero's movement from despair to hope. The search for the discovery of a sense of community is the major action of these works. Of particular interest are revelations about the nature of this newly found hope as well as affirmations made along the way. This discussion should provide the necessary materials upon which to base a broader analysis of the overall direction of Williams' works. Preliminary conclusions about the significance of these two plays will be presented after the initial explications.

The Night of the Iguana

The title of this play partially suggests its basic meaning. It is the drama of a man who, like a captive iguana at the end of a rope, escapes before he is annihilated. This action of liberation is accomplished metaphorically when the male protagonist, T. Lawrence Shannon, sets free an iguana which has been held captive during the major action of the drama. Shortly after he cuts the rope binding the struggling iguana, the following exchange illumines the meaning of the title:

> MAXINE:
> What are you doing down there, Shannon?
>
> SHANNON:
> I cut loose one of God's creatures at the end of
> the rope.
>
> MAXINE [tolerantly]:
> What'd you do that for, Shannon?
>
> SHANNON:
> So that one of God's creatures could scramble home
> safe and free. . . . A little act of grace, Maxine.[1]

The iguana represents, in addition to Shannon, the human race in general and the world of the 1940's in particular. (The author makes obvious attempts to compare the Nazi bombardment of London with the crisis of the hero.) Yet the play basically describes one man's problem and his soul-searching attempt to resolve it.

The action of the drama, divided into three acts, consumes ten or twelve hours on the afternoon, evening, and night of a summer day in 1940. The place is the Costa Verde, where a run down hotel "sits on a jungle-covered hilltop overlooking the 'celeta,' or 'morning beach' of Puerto Barrio in Mexico." The Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon arrives at the hotel in the heat of the day. We learn immediately that he is a former Episcopalian minister who was de-frocked for "fornication and heresy . . . in the same week." Since the dismissal from his parish, his self-esteem has deteriorated. At one time he was a director for the Cook tour company with a specialty in the Holy Land. Now he is the guide of the cheapest tour offered by an obscure organization known as "Blake's Tours." (Williams could have been referring to William Blake's "The Bible of Hell" and etchings of the underworld. This would be consistent with Shannon's comment that of late he has been touring "God-forsaken" areas.) When the play begins he is the frustrated leader of a bus which carries "Schoolteachers at a Baptist Female College in Blowing Rock, Texas." He reveals that he is about to lose even this job because the head teacher, Miss Fellowes (a lesbian), has discovered that Shannon has been the recipient of amorous overtures from a nubile teenage passenger named Charlotte Goodall.

Shannon makes this unscheduled stop at the Costa Verde Hotel to visit with some old friends, the owners, Fred and Maxine Faulk. He quickly learns from the lusty Maxine that "Fred is dead." Shannon is quite disappointed because his conversations with Fred had been therapeutic in the past. Maxine, planning for an erotic encounter with Shannon, invites him to let his bus-load spend the night at the hotel. He decides to stay and urges his reluctant school teachers to unpack the bus. This proves to be the last stop for Shannon as leader of the tour, for the jealous Miss Fellowes demands by wire a replacement for Shannon. She impatiently listens to his confession, "like everyone else, at some time or other in life, my life has cracked up on me." She cannot comprehend him when he says: "Miss Fellowes, don't, don't, don't . . . do what . . . you're doing! . . . Don't! Break! Human! Pride!" The suggestion is that Miss Fellowes has accomplished just that. Jobless Shannon is broken both spiritually and economically.

Despite his seemingly hopeless condition, Shannon's destiny is not despair. Quite unexpectedly two guests arrive at the hotel. They are Hannah Jelkes, a middle-aged New England painter, and her "97 year old" Grandfather, Nonno, a "minor league poet with a major league spirit." They manage to support themselves by reciting poems and sketching portraits in eating places throughout the world. The production notes read:

> HANNAH is remarkable-looking--ethereal, almost ghostly. She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint, but animated. She could be thirty, she could be forty: she is totally feminine and yet androgynous-looking-almost timeless. (Act I.)

After the entrance of this pair, the play focuses almost exclusively upon Shannon, Hannah and Nonno. Hannah and Shannon have two conversations in Act II and another extended conversation in Act III. In each conversation Shannon resembles the thrashing iguana which has been tied to a stake near the hotel. This resemblance is important for, like the iguana, Shannon also is liberated during his last conversation with Hannah in Act III. Meanwhile, Nonno completes a poem--his first in twenty years--and then he dies. The poem deals with the subjects of courage and endurance, central topics in the three conversations between Shannon and Hannah.

Shannon first encounters Hannah while he is wearing his clerical collar and cross (attached to a chain around his neck) for the purpose of proving to the Baptist school teachers that he is still a minister of the gospel. He relates that he was ousted from his church for fornicating with a willing parishioner. In his final sermon, he relates, he told his congregation:

> I'm tired of conducting services in praise and worship of a senile delinquent--yeah, that's what I said, I shouted! All your Western theologies, the whole mythology of them, are based on the concept of God as a senile delinquent and, by God, I will not and cannot continue to conduct services in praise and worship of this, this . . . this. . . . angry, petulant old man. I mean he's represented like a bad-tempered childish old, old, sick, peevish man--I mean like the sort of old man in a nursing home that's putting together a jigsaw puzzle and can't put it together and gets furious at it and kicks over the table. Yes, I tell you they do that, all our theologies do it--accuse God of being a cruel, senile delinquent, blaming the world and brutally punishing all he created for his own faults in construction. . . . (Act II.)

After Shannon's service at the Episcopal Church in Pleasant Valley, Virginia, a thunderstorm broke. He indicates that the turbulent weather was a symbolic gesture of the God described in his sermon. But his parishioners were unwilling to listen as he shouted at them, "Go home and close your house windows, all your windows and doors, against the truth about God!"

Hannah's response is typical of her philosophy. She tells Shannon simply that when he returns to the ministry his sermons to the complacent congregation should not be filled with angry denunciations.

> HANNAH [smiling a little]:
> I have a strong feeling you will go back to the Church with this evidence you've been collecting, but when you do and it's a black Sunday morning, look out over the congregation, over the smug, complacent faces for a few old, very old faces, looking up at you, as you begin your sermon, with eyes like a piercing cry for something to still look up to, something to still believe in. And then I think you'll not shout about

> what you shouted that black Sunday in Pleasant Valley, Virginia. I think you will throw away the violent, furious sermon, you'll toss it into the chancel, and talk about. . . no, maybe talk about . . . nothing . . . just . . .
>
> SHANNON:
> What?
>
> HANNAH:
> Lead them beside still waters, Mr. Shannon.
> (Act II.)

The first conversation between Shannon and Hannah is important because it introduces the concerns which occupy their attention later. It is important to note that Shannon expresses his desire to reformulate the traditional conception of God. He says that he is searching for the "truth" about the accepted formulation of God. The "truth" is that the Western "God" is manifest in thunderstorms and calamities. But traditional theologies refuse to recognize the reality of the absurdity of the human condition reflected in cosmic terror. Hannah's response to Shannon indicates the course which she will pursue later. Rather than agreeing with Shannon's analysis, she suggests that he should learn to accept life quietly.

Before Shannon talks again with Hannah, he has a brief encounter with Nonno after the latter experienced a "cerebral accident" not uncommon for a man of ninety-seven years. According to the production notes, "The old man touches something in him which is outside his concern with himself." While Shannon never verbalizes his feelings about Nonno, it is obvious that he is moved by the elder gentleman's bouyant spirit in the face of imminent death. Nonno thus is an embodiment of the kind of endurance to which Hannah alluded in the first conversation.

The second major conversation between Shannon and Hannah occurs at the end of Act II. Shannon has offered a cigarette to Hannah. That she can light both their cigarettes in the wind amazes Shannon. He asks how she learned to accomplish such a feat. She replies:

> HANNAH:
> Oh, I've learned lots of useful little things like that. I wish I'd learned some big ones.
>
> SHANNON:
> Such as what?
>
> HANNAH:
> How to help you, Mr. Shannon . . .
>
> SHANNON:
> Now I know why I came here!
>
> HANNAH:
> To meet someone who can light a match in the wind?
>
> SHANNON [looking down at the table, his voice choking]:
> To meet someone who wants to help me, Miss Jelkes. . . .
> [He makes a quick, embarrassed turn in the chair, as if to avoid her seeing that he has tears in his eyes. She regards him steadily and tenderly, as she would her grandfather.]
>
> HANNAH:
> Has it been so long since anyone has wanted to help you, or have you just. . . .

> SHANNON:
> Have I--what?
>
> HANNAH:
> Just been so much involved with a struggle in yourself that you haven't noticed when people have wanted to help you, the little they can? I know people torture each other many times like devils, but sometimes they do see and know each other, you know, and then, if they're decent, they do want to help each other all that they can. . . . (Act II.)

Unlike the first conversation, no specific issues are raised. The encounter leads Shannon to acknowledge that another human being is willing to help him. When the act closes, a rainstorm forces them inside the hotel. Shannon walks onto the verandah and stands in the rain. Williams' stage directions clearly suggest that by the end of Act II Shannon is partially changed. He has, as he says, discovered "why I came here!" No longer is he belligerent. He acknowledges that Hannah will serve as a guide through his personal crisis:

> SHANNON extends his hands under the rainfall, turning them in it as if to cool them. Then he cups them to catch the water in his palms and bathes his forehead with it. The rainfall increases. The sound of the marimba band at the beach cantina is brought up the hill by the wind. SHANNON lowers his hands from his burning forehead and stretches them out through the rain's silver sheet as if he were reaching for something outside and beyond himself. Then nothing is visible but these reaching-out hands. A pure white flash of lightening reveals HANNAH and NONNO against the wall, behind SHANNON, and the electric globe suspended from the roof goes out, the power extinguished by the storm. A clear shaft of light strays on SHANNON's reaching-out hands till the stage curtain has fallen, slowly. (Act II, Production Notes.)

In Act III Williams suggests that Shannon is the human-equivalent of an iquana which is held captive near the verandah. This is implied by the cross chained around his neck and the ropes which Maxine, thinking him insane, has bound around him. Shannon, "with an animal outcry begins to pull at the chain suspending the gold cross about his neck. PANCHO watches indifferently as the chain cuts the back of SHANNON'S neck. HANNAH rushed out to him." Maxine shouts to her helpers, "Catch him, he's crazy. Bring him back and tie him up!" The ropes around Shannon in the hammock thus have the effect of a straight-jacket. It is important to notice that it is in this setting that Shannon has his last and most transforming conversation with Hannah.

Even though Hannah is concerned about Shannon, she refuses to sympathize completely with his tortured outcries. She even accuses Shannon of enjoying it masochistically. She warns him that the price of redemption is much higher:

> Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Mr. Shannon. There's something almost voluptuous in the way that you twist and groan in that hammock--no nails, no blood, no death. Isn't that a comparatively comfortable, almost voluptuous kind of crucifixion to suffer for the guilt of the world, Mr. Shannon? . . . . I'd like to untie you right now, but let me wait till you've passed through your present disturbance. You're still indulging yourself in your . . . Passion Play

> performance. I can't help observing this self-indulgence in you. (Act III.)

Hannah, unconvinced by Shannon's neurotic display, nevertheless admires his underlying motive: "I respect a person who has to fight and howl for his decency. . . ." Unlike Maxine, who says that Shannon's weakness is that he cannot keep his hands off liquor and women, Hannah tells him that his problem is the eternal problem of belief:

> SHANNON:
> What is my problem, Miss Jelkes?
>
> HANNAH:
> The oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone--almost anyone--almost anything . . . something.
>
> SHANNON:
> Your voice sounds hopeless about it.
>
> HANNAH:
> No, I'm not hopeless about it. In fact, I've discovered something to believe in.
>
> SHANNON:
> Something like . . . God?
>
> HANNAH:
> No.
>
> SHANNON:
> What?
>
> HANNAH:
> Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if it's just for one night only.
>
> SHANNON:
> One night stands, huh?

> HANNAH:
> One night . . . communication between them on a verandah outside their . . . separate cubicles, Mr. Shannon.
>
> SHANNON:
> You don't mean physically, do you?
>
> HANNAH:
> No.
>
> SHANNON:
> A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other struggle through nights like this. (Act III.)

Ultimately, Hannah says, Shannon must learn to endure. When he learns this, she says, he will be able to face life as well as death. She recollects a place in Shanghai called "the House for the dying" in which she saw countless numbers of old and exhausted people lying on straw mats awaiting death. Because of acts of kindness by relatives--flowers, candles, and religious emblems--the dying had eyes which were alive and "as clear as the Southern Cross."

Hannah is Shannon's moral instructor for the remainder of the play. On two occasions he refers to her as "Miss. . . Thin-Standing-Up-Female Buddha." She speaks about endurance, hope, and the ability to see beyond the despair of death. Whenever Shannon questions her, she answers consistently with statements congruent with her philosophy of "acceptance." For example, Shannon asks about her experience of physical love.

The only relationship she discusses in detail occurred with an Australian salesman whom she met in Singapore. After buying one of her paintings, he invited her out in a sampan where he eventually asked her to favor him by taking off a piece of clothing for him to handle. She obliged him: "He didn't move except to seize the article he'd requested. I looked the other way while his satisfaction took place." Shannon is surprised that the incident did not disgust her. Hannah's response is that "nothing human disgusts me unless it's unkind and violent." The central affirmation of her philosophy is that one must accept those situations which cannot be improved.

Shannon suggests that even though he and Hannah could not share sexual love, they nevertheless might travel together. She reminds him that he is not well enough to travel with anyone:

> SHANNON:
> You mean that I'm stuck here for good? Winding up with the inconsolable widow?
>
> HANNAH:
> We all wind up with something or someone and if it's someone instead of just something, we're lucky, perhaps . . . unusually lucky.

The fact that Hannah does indeed lead Shannon through what may properly be called a conversion is indicated by his rising from his hammock and breaking the ropes which bind him. Then he suggests that Hannah take the gold cross, now removed from his neck, and pawn it for enough money to carry her to her next destination. Now free of his symbols of despair (the ropes and the gold cross), Shannon hastens to liberate the captive iguana. He symbolically repeats his own liberation from despair:

> We'll play God tonight like kids play house with old broken crates and boxes. All right? Now Shannon is going down there with his machete and cut the damn lizard loose so it can run back to its bushes because God won't do it and we are going to play God here.

Immediately after iguana is released, Nonno shouts from his cubicle that he has completed his poem. He asks Hannah to write it down as he recites it. The poem concerns a tree which has passed its "zenith" of life and now begins a "second history." It is most fitting at this point, not only in terms of its emphasis upon courage and endurance, but also in terms of its philosophy of acceptance of the unchangeable aspects of life spoken of earlier by his granddaughter.

> How calmly does the orange branch
> Observe the sky begin to blanch
> Without a cry, without a prayer,
> With no betrayal of despair.
>
> Sometime while night obscures the tree
> The zenith of its life will be
> Gone past forever, and from thence
> A second history will commence.
>
> A chronicle no longer gold,
> A bargaining with mist and mould,
> And finally the broken stem
> The plummeting to earth; and then

> An intercourse not well designed
> For beings of a golden kind
> Whose native green must arch above
> The earth's obscene, corrupting love.
>
> And still the ripe fruit and the branch
> Observe the sky begin to blanch
> Without a cry, without a prayer,
> With no betrayal of despair.
>
> O Courage, could you not as well
> Select a second place to dwell,
> Not only in that golden tree
> But in the frightened heart of me?
> (Act III.)

Shortly after the recitation Nonno dies. Now Hannah must travel alone. Shannon will stay at the Costa Verde Hotel to assist Maxine. He commits himself, even though he realizes the irony of his commitment, to Maxine Faulk. This action indicates that he has learned the difficult art of acceptance of the unavoidable in life. Hannah has taught him well. For the first time in a play by Tennessee Williams, the hero resolves his difficulties. He accepts willingly the form of community which Maxine offers. The closing lines have the effect of "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih" at the end of T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland. Hannah, overlooking Maxine and Shannon as they make their peace, says: "Oh, God, can't we stop now? Finally? Please let us. It's so quiet here now."

No play by Tennessee Williams previous to The Night of the Iguana ends with a sense of resolution of conflict. This is the first play in which the hero finds a historical community in which he can function without fear of alienation. An earlier play which most nearly approximates this, Camino Real, achieves community only on a highly allegorical level beyond history. T. Lawrence Shannon, however, is liberated from isolation. Hannah convinces him that he can live in community even though it may be short of ideal: "We all wind up with something or someone and if it's someone instead of just something, we're lucky, perhaps . . . unusually lucky." The climactic poem by Nonno reinforces Hannah's point. The metaphorical tree embodies both the fear and hope of Shannon. Faced with the reality of his extinction, both professionally and psychologically or spiritually, Shannon finds the courage to exist. But this existence is robbed of all its heroic potential when Shannon accepts the present as unchangeable.

One of the remarkable characteristics of the criticism of these later works, beginning specifically with The Night of the Iguana and continuing through The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, is the insistence upon viewing them as thematically continuous with the earlier works. (Some attempt will be made at the end of this chapter to delineate thematic discontinuity.) Norman J. Fedder writes: "Pity for the nervous everywhere--the lament again; and Sex! Sex everywhere--Lawrence again.[2]

While sex is a subject in the drama, it is most difficult to characterize the drama in such a manner without overlooking other significant subjects. One obvious way to notice thematic development is to compare the play with an early short story by the same title, "Night of the Iguana," which appeared in the controversial collection of short stories entitled One Arm and Other Stories.[3] The story concerns a thirty year old spinster who is vacationing at a resort near Acapulco. She is disturbed and fascinated by two young homosexuals who make no attempt to conceal their relationship. Near the end of the story, Miss Jelkes solicits the affection of the elder of the two men. While she does not have intercourse with him, they have some physical contact--enough for her emotional release. This experience, totally physical in nature, is symbolized by the release of an iguana which has been held captive throughout the story.

The only similarities between the play and the early story are the character Miss Jelkes (now Hannah, not Edith) and the captive iguana. In the story the release of the iguana represents a sexual experience. In the play, on the other hand, the thrashing animal is liberated at the point of Shannon's personal liberation, and this is a development more nearly spiritual than sexual in nature. Furthermore, Hannah Jelkes (the character in the play) is a stable heroine whereas, Edith Jelkes is hopelessly neurotic. In short, there are few similarities beyond the title.

The epigraph to the drama, never mentioned by critics, indicates the nature of Williams' more recent thematic development:

And so, as Kinsmen, met at Night--
We talked between the Rooms--
Until the Moss had reached our lips--
And covered up--our names--

This is the last stanza of Poem "449" written by Emily Dickinson. The preceding stanzas illuminate the meaning of this stanza selected by Williams.

I died for Beauty--but was scarce
Adjusted in the Tomb
When One who died for Truth, was lain
In an adjoining Room--

He questioned softly "Why I failed"?
"For Beauty", I replied--
"And I--for Truth--Themself are One--
We Bretheren, are", He said--[4]

"Truth" and "Beauty" are the central concepts in this brief poem about death. Williams probably chose the closing stanza because it emphasizes for him the conversation between the "Kinsmen," Hannah and Shannon. It would appear that Shannon is the party concerned with "Truth" and Hannah with "Beauty." In the process of their conversation the priest and the painter arrive at the same conclusion. They are "Bretheren."

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore

The themes of truth and death, central to The Night of the Iguana, are defined with a measure of precision in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. Shannon and Hannah discuss the nature of courage in a manner which anticipates the conversations in this play between Christopher Flanders and Mrs. Goforth. The chief difference between the two plays is that the latter deals directly with the problem of death in life. This drama, in a manner similar to Camino Real, drastically removes itself from conventional theatre. Williams' production notes clarify this purpose:

> I have added to the cast a pair of stage assistants that function in a way that's between the Kabuki Theatre of Japan and the chorus of Greek theatre. My excuse, or reason, is that I think the play will come off better the further it is removed from conventional theatre, since it's been rightly described as an allegory and as a "sophisticated fairy tale."[5]

Some of the major allegorical elements are interjected by the stage assistants who appear at various times in the course of the drama for the purpose of suggesting moods and changing the set. As the prologue begins, they raise a banner containing an emblem of a golden griffin. They explain to the audience that the griffin is a mythological creature, "half lion, and half eagle. . . . And completely human." The griffin represents

Mrs. Goforth. It is lowered at the end of the play when she dies.

The major characters fulfill various symbolic functions. Mrs. Goforth is an aging beauty who discovers in the process of the play that she is about to die or "go forth." Although the action takes place on the coast of Italy, it is clear that Mrs. Goforth is identified with modern America. Her name suggests an aggressive quality identified with American success story. She is, to generalize, a female counterpart to F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby. She is dictating her memoirs to her secretary, Blackie, when the action begins. Blackie dutifully records that the first of her five husbands, Harlon Goforth, was a "dignified tycoon! was a man that Presidents put next to their wives at banquets in the White House" (Scene i). Mrs. Goforth keeps abreast of the developments on the stock market. In a telephone conversation with her broker, she says:

> Chuck, baby, how're we doing? Ah-huh, glamour stocks still slipping? Don't hold on to 'em, dump them before they drop under what I bought 'em at, baby. We'll start buying back when they hit the basement level.--Don't give me an argument, Sell! Sell! Hell! It's building into a crash! So, baby, I'm hitting the silk! High, low, jack and the grave! Ho! Ho! (Scene i.)

Mrs. Goforth's story of her rise to wealth is, with a few Williamsian modifications, as American as the Horation Alger myth:

> I was born between a swamp on the wrong side of the tracks in One Street, Georgia, but not even that could stop me in my tracks, wrong side or right side, or no side. Hit show-biz at fifteen when a carnival show, I mean manager of it, saw me and dug me in that one street in One Street, Georgia. I was billed as the Dixie Doxy, was just supposed to keep my tongue moving, too, and the verbal comments I made on my anatomical motions while in motion were a public delight. So I breezed through show-biz like a tornado, rising from one-week "gigs" in the sticks to star billing in the Follies while still in m'teens, ho, ho . . . and I was still in my teens when I married Harlon Goforth, a marriage into the Social Register and Dun and Bradstreet's both. Was barely out of my teens when I became his widow. (Scene v.)

These glimpses into Mrs. Goforth's past provide, in addition to the modified American success story, Williams' familiar sexual symbology. This emphasis has misled at least one critic.[6] Mrs. Goforth's sexual abilities need not imply that she is simply another character with a distended libido. Such is not the case here, for the flesh fails Mrs. Goforth. She dies of tuberculosis near the end of the play. The failure of the flesh to contribute lasting meaning to the heroine of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore emphasizes the importance of the play's epigraph from William Butler Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium":

> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.[7]

Like the "aged man" of Yeats's poem, Mrs. Goforth also has qualities of the scarecrow. Her secretary, Blackie, often refers to her as a "monster." Her existence, like Yeats's "dying generations," lacks meaning. Despite her material possessions, she nevertheless is a restless soul; indeed it is an intellectual restlessness. This is why she plays the "truth game." "The meaning of life," she says, was a subject her wealthy friends could not bring themselves to discuss. Mrs. Goforth longs to depart from her own generation of frustrated materialists.

Despite Mrs. Goforth's apparent lack of sympathy for Christopher Flanders, she looks to him for guidance as she approaches death. Referring to the epigraph again, one might compare Christopher to Yeats's vision of Byzantium. The poet and sculptor embodies the characteristics of Yeats's ancient Byzanthium, which one article has described as

> the city of perfected art. It is also a city dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. . . . For this wisdom is the wisdom of both East and West: Byzantium was the meeting place of the two cultures that have formed the Western world. The whole city, with its great dome and its mosaics which defy nature and assert transcendence, and its theologically rooted synthetic culture, can serve the poet as an image of the Heavenly City and the state of the soul when it is "out of nature."[8]

To extend the analogy to the epigraph, it may be helpful to view Christopher Flanders as Mrs. Goforth's guide to the "holy city of Byzantium."

Christopher's name symbolically contains both Christianity (Christ-bearer) and death (Flander's fields). His similarities to Jesus Christ are many. He is in his early thirties. He tells Mrs. Goforth that he has gone without food for "non-secular reasons" (Scene v). In scene six he sips milk "as if it were sacramental wine." Shortly after this, Mrs. Goforth asks him with more seriousness than her facetious tone implies, "Can you walk on water?" At the end of the scene, after Mrs. Goforth has died, Blackie and Christopher share a communion meal: "*She rises and pours wine into a medieval goblet as she speaks to CHRIS*."

Williams links Christianity with oriental thought in the person of Christopher just as Yeats combined Eastern and Western ideologies in "Sailing to Byzantium."[9] Christopher's philosophy and style of life encompass the historic reality of the person of Jesus as well as the rich religious heritage of the East. Mrs. Goforth and Christopher spend a great deal of time discussing the "meaning of life" according to an Indian Swami whose poetry Christopher has translated and printed. In an extended conversation which Mrs. Goforth calls "the truth game," they speak about the significance of the Swami's insistence upon silence:

> MRS. GOFORTH:
> No message, he didn't have any message?

> CHRIS:
> Yes, that night it was silence, it was the meaning of silence.
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> Silence? Meaning?
>
> CHRIS:
> Acceptance.
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> What of?
>
> CHRIS:
> Oh, many things, everything, nearly. Such as how to live and to die in a way that's more dignified than most of us know how to do it. And of how not to be frightened of not knowing what isn't meant to be known, acceptance of not knowing anything but the moment of still existing, until we stop existing--and acceptance of that moment, too. (Scene vi.)

At this point, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore is continuous thematically with The Night of the Iguana. Hannah Jelkes and Christopher Flanders have a common philosophy of "acceptance." By virtue of his symbolic richness, however, Christopher adds a theological dimension not explicit in the character of Hannah. Christopher represents the incarnate Christ; he urges Mrs. Goforth to understand the meaning of the incarnation as he attempts to embody it:

> CHRIS:
> I know you better than you know me. I admire you, admire you so much I almost like you, almost. I think if that old Greek explorer, Pytheas, hadn't beat you to it by centuries, you would have sailed up through the Gates of Hercules to map out the Western world, and you would have sailed up farther and mapped it out—better than he did. No storm could

> have driven you back or changed your course. Oh, no, you're nobody's fool, Mrs. Goforth, if you don't know that finally, sooner or later, you need somebody or something to mean God to you, even if it's a cow on the streets of Bombay, or carved rock on the Easter Islands or--
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> You came here to bring me *God*, did you?
>
> CHRIS:
> I didn't say God, I said someone or something to--
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> I heard what you said, you said *God*. My eyes are out of focus but not my ears! Well, *bring* Him, I'm ready to lay out a red carpet for Him, but how do you bring Him? Whistle? Ring a bell for Him? [*She snatches a bell off her desk and rings fiercely* . . . . *She staggers back against the desk, gasping.*]
> (Scene vi.)

Christopher's reluctance to accept Mrs. Goforth's statement that he "came here to bring me God" is extremely important. He speaks consistently not of God but of a physical representation, an incarnation of God. His idea of God may be seen in his chosen vocation as a comforting angel of death. His primary function is to bestow kindness and sympathy as did the historic Christ:

> CHRIS:
> You're not on a healthful regime. You know, the spirit has to live in the body, and so you have to keep the body in a state of repair because it's the home of the--spirit. . . .
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> Hmmmm. Are you talking about your spirit and body, or mine?

> CHRIS:
> Yours.
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> One long-ago meeting between us, and you expect me to believe you care more about my spirit and body than your own, Mr. Flanders?
>
> CHRIS:
> Mrs. Goforth, some people, some people, most of them, get panicky when they're not cared for by somebody, but I get panicky when I have no one to care for.
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> Oh, you seem to be setting yourself up as a--as a saint of some kind. . . .
>
> CHRIS:
> All I said is I need somebody to care for. I don't say that--[He has finished his coffee and he crosses to the warmer for more.] I'm playing the truth game with you. Caring for somebody gives me the sense of being--sheltered, protected. . . .
>
> MRS. GOFORTH:
> "Sheltered, protected" from what?
>
> CHRIS [standing above her]:
> Unreality!--Lostness?
> (Scene v.)

Whether Christopher convinces Mrs. Goforth of her need for "something to mean God" is not clear even at the end of the play. In the closing conversation between Blackie and Christopher, he says that she made some positive response to his presence:

> BLACKIE:
> Did she say anything before she--?
>
> CHRIS:
> She said to me: "Be here when I wake up." . . . .

> [Blackie comes up beside him on the forestage and offers him the wine goblet. A wave is heard breaking under the mountain.]
>
> BLACKIE:
> The sea is saying the name of your next mobile.
>
> CHRIS:
> Boom!
>
> BLACKIE:
> What does it mean?
>
> CHRIS:
> It says "Boom" and that's just what it means. No translation, no explanation, just "Boom." [He drinks from the goblet and passes it back to her.]
> (Scene vi.)

Perhaps it is mistaken to ask whether Christopher made a convert to his philosophy. It should be remembered that the response of the aged woman is not as important as the fact that Christopher is given the opportunity to fulfill his vocation. If it is true, as the epigraph suggests, that Christopher is Mrs. Goforth's guide to the "holy city of Byzantium," then it is enough that Mrs. Goforth simply die. The stagehands comment to this effect:

> ONE:
> Flag-lowering ceremony on the late Mrs. Goforth's mountain.
>
> TWO:
> Bugle? [A muted bugle is heard from a distance.]
> That's not taps, that's reveille.
>
> ONE:
> It's reveille always, taps never, for the gold griffin.

> TWO:
> One more obvious statement is one too many. [He snaps his fingers.] Let's go. (Scene vi.)

The "obvious" would have been objectionable at this point in the drama. However, Williams makes Yeats's poem in the epigraph say what probably is meant by the "obvious":

> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.

The central symbol throughout the drama is the banner of the golden griffin. When the assistants remark that it is "reveille always, taps never, for the gold griffin," they mean that Mrs. Goforth now has been gathered "Into the artifice of eternity." The last stanza of the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" speaks of a new form--one such as "Grecian goldsmiths make/ Of hammered gold and gold enamelling." Williams' understanding of the gold griffin may be interpreted in at least three ways. He may be concentrating on its bird-like quality. Thus at her death Mrs. Goforth may be transformed into the golden bird which sings "To the lords and ladies of Byzantium/ Of what is past, or passing, or to come." On the other hand, the image of the mythological griffin (half lion, half eagle) may symbolize the singular rarity of Mrs. Goforth. Like the griffin, she also possesses distinctively incongruent qualities. Despite her occasional vulgarity, she is also as pure as the mythological bird. She combines an unflinching desire to know the "truth" with occasional lapses into neurotic falsehood. Her range of experience from One Street, Georgia, to dinner parties at the White House, is seldom found in one person. She is capable of speaking of sexual love, the stock market and God in the same breath. Like the griffin, she is a combination of opposites. At the same time, it should be remembered, this plurality detracts from the previous interpretation based on the epigraph from Yeats's poem. The pilgrim who sails to Byzantium has but one goal in the face of death--eternity. On the other hand, Mrs. Goforth's goal--even at her death--is clouded with ambiguity. She contrasts with Christopher's unambiguous identity as a bearer of "something to mean God." We are faced once again with Williams' failure to bring under control his symbolic structure.[10]

The Theological Dimension of The Night of The Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore

Tennessee Williams' thematic development in these two recent plays has not gone unnoticed by critics. Professor William R. Mueller, referring to both of these plays, writes: "It appears that Williams is working toward a different response to life, one which carries more hopefulness than his earlier view."[11] Professor Mueller is unwilling to speak of this hopefulness in theological terms. However, a theatre critic, Mr. Dan Isaac, recently wrote in the New York Times: "The last thing the American public is prepared to believe about Tennessee Williams is that he is a religious mystic!"[12] Mr. Isaac argues that Williams is setting out "a metaphysic that will answer the questions that terrify, indeed traumatize, his major dramatic figures: the meaning of life under the aspect of death in a godless universe."[13] Buddhism, according to Mr. Isaac, properly designates the nature of Williams' recent themes.

That Williams' later plays reflect a theological dimension is indeed one of the major arguments of this dissertation. However, Mr. Isaac's suggestion that Mr. Williams is replacing Christianity with Buddhism must be questioned. Here is a sample of his reasoning in his discussion of The Night Of The Iguana:

> It was in the Far East that Hannah had this experience that affected her as though it were a religious revelation; and insofar as she passes the story of this experience on to Shannon, a spoiled priest, as though it were the highest kind of wisdom, what this play argues is the exhaustion of one religious tradition and the arrival of another. Much tortured by his own conception of God as the violent agent of thunder and lightening, Shannon began "touring God's world" in what is clearly meant to be a religious quest. That he twice refers to Hannah as "Miss-Thin-Standing-Up-Female-Buddha" suggests that for playwright Williams, a form of Buddhism has come to replace Christianity as a source of valid religious authority and ethics.[14]

The critic is correct in his statement that Christianity does not appear viable to T. Lawrence Shannon. Nevertheless, the description of Hannah as a female Buddha is hardly sufficient evidence upon which to base an assertion that Buddhism has replaced Christianity in Williams' dramatic world. It will be remembered that Williams also describes the earthy Maxine Faulk in terms associated with the Orient:

> She is prepared for a night swim, a vividly striped towel thrown over her shoulders. It is apparent that the night's progress has mellowed her spirit; her face wears a faint smile which is suggestive of those cool, impersonal, all-comprehending smiles on the carved heads of Egyptian or Oriental deities (Act III).

Maxine surely would not be equated either with Hannah or with Buddhism despite Williams' use of Eastern imagery to describe her appearance. There may be significance in Hannah' discovery of the passive principle in the East. At the same time, one must also take into account Hannah's sympathy for the Christian tradition. For example, she admonishes Shannon:

> Who wouldn't like to suffer and atone for the sins of himself and the world if it could be done in a hammock with ropes instead of nails, on a hill that's so much lovelier than Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, Mr. Shannon? (Act III).

The critical procedure at this point should take into account both the references to Christianity and Buddhism. Furthermore, these references and others are not always central to the meaning of the drama. At times they simply are a part of the linguistic heritage upon which Williams draws as a writer. It is not so simple as Mr. Isaac would have it. The fundamental issue in these later plays is the struggle to define a way to exist in the face of death and despair.

The struggle, in both Iguana and Milk Train, takes place within a theological context. Shannon, for example, desires to find the "truth" about God and himself. Before encountering the logic of Hannah, his theology resembles the cannibalistic theology of Sebastian Venable of Suddenly Last Summer. Shannon shouts:

> It's going to storm tonight--a terrific electric storm. Then you will see the Reverend T. Lawrence Shannon's conception of God almighty paying a visit to the world he's created. I want to go back to the Church and preach the gospel of God as Lightning and Thunder . . . and also stray dogs vivisected and

> . . . and . . . and . . . [*He points out suddenly toward the sea.*] That's him! There he is now! [*He is pointing out at a blaze, a majestic apocalypse of gold light, shafting the sky as the sun drops into the Pacific.*] His oblivious majesty--and here I am on this . . . dilapidated verandah of a cheap hotel, out of season, in a country caught and destroyed in its flesh and corrupted in its spirit by its gold-hungry Conquistadores that bore the flag of the Inquisition along with the Cross of Christ. Yes . . . and . . . [*There is a pause.*] (Act I.)

When Shannon adopts the point of view suggested by Hannah, of course, he abandons his early picture of God in "His oblivious majesty." Guided carefully by Hannah's teachings, Shannon learns to accept life as it is. When he finally assumes a place within the human community, his terrifying vision both of God and man vanishes. Thus Professor Mueller appears to be aware of a fundamental problem when he writes that the play, despite its hopefulness, is "depressing" because it suggests "victory through resignation."[14]

Williams' theological vision, as indicated previously, is implicit in some of his earlier works. Blanche Du Bois and even Tom Wingfield demonstrate awareness of the importance of resolving the problem of human isolation. Yet they cannot achieve resolution. Their isolation, a distinctive mark of tragedy, emphasizes their incompleteness. The solution for the problem of human isolation in *The Night of the Iguana*, as pointed out earlier, incorporates theological insights from oriental and Christian thought. Another indication of Williams' theological vision is his movement toward the comic spirit in the last two plays discussed. Shannon's affirmation of community with Maxine Faulk, although expressed in an ironic manner, appears to be the kind of affirmation normally identified with comedy.[15] At least, with the wise counsel of Hannah Jelkes and her grandfather, Shannon leaves the brink of personal dissolution and plans to chart a new, if compromising, course as the play ends.

Precautions about theological vagueness are unnecessary for the last work discussed in this chapter. Christopher Flanders obviously accomplishes his mission before the end of The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. He satisfies his need to be an "angel of death" and thus saves himself from "Unreality" and "Lostness." The allegorical quality of the drama suggests once again the important shift in the works of Williams which was evident as early as Camino Real: the movement away from the earth and its frustrating problems charted with such accurate tenderness in the early plays. Mrs. Goforth is prepared for death just as Shannon in The Night of the Iguana is prepared for a happy community within an insular and non-threatening situation. Rather than resolve the problems of man's inhumanity, human despair, and loneliness within history, Williams has the protagonists take the easy way out by accepting the "unchangeable." This acceptance, which may be viewed legitimately as acquiescence, saves them from despair. The question of whether this solution adequately deals with the problems raised within the plays will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE PLAYS

The theological developments apparent in the later works of Tennessee Williams, discussed in the preceding chapter, are fundamental to the claims of this dissertation. The hero's transition from despair to hope is the identifying characteristic of what may be described as the play's general theological dimension. Furthermore, it has been suggested that Williams' recent dramas of hope are inferior to his earlier dramas of despair. In this and other respects Williams has betrayed his hero and, more fundamentally, his art. In order to consider the significance of these points, a brief review of the published criticism of his works will be helpful. Thereafter the specific claims of this dissertation will be presented in detail.

Many discussions of Williams' works make no mention of thematic development. These discussions usually indicate that Williams wrote two good plays, The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire. Everything since then, according to Professor Nathan A. Scott, Jr., exhibits little relationship to these two early efforts. "If Tennessee Williams ever succeeds in outgrowing the frivolousness and vulgarity that has disfigured so much of his work, there is reason to suppose that the creator of The Glass Menagerie and Streetcar might well become a major presence in modern theatre."[1] Miss Signi Falk's opinion is similar to Scott's:

> There was real promise in the early short stories and in the short plays of Tennessee Williams. . . . All of his plays have been concerned, to some degree, with little people in a mechanistic society; but his urge to reach a large audience has forced him to obscure this basic theme by overemphasizing other and sometimes rather dubious subjects or by grossly exaggerating character and scene. With the years and with experience he has become as much of a theatrical magician as a dramatist.[2]

Miss Falk clarifies her statement when she suggests that Williams has overemphasized the subject of sex:

> Williams has worked with a number of interesting themes; but the favorite--and the one that most obscures most of the others--is the idea of sex as the symbol of freedom, sex as the great liberator, sex as the only valid manifestation of religion and love, sex as the only synonym for life. He may have begun with an interest in another theme; but after the success of The Glass Menagerie, and as if he were trying to maintain his popular appeal, he blurs an interesting theme with scene after scene which does little more than add sexual excitement. For a man of so much talent, it is a pity that, as his critics have so often lamented, he should be suffering from sex on the brain.[3]

In his survey of modern southern American fiction and drama, Professor John M. Bradbury speaks negatively about thematic development in Williams works since The Glass Menagerie:

> Tennessee Williams' development, through eleven major plays, has been an almost uninterrupted movement from compassion and poetry to harshly dramatic exposure of twisted and perverted lives. . . . Whether his subject is frustration, violence, or self-deceit--and these are his major problems--whether his plots are simple or multiple, he builds his scenes of revelation or clash with a sure sense of their cumulative effect.[4]

Other critics, although not concerned with thematic development or lack of it, have made judgements similar to those above.[5]

Thematic development in the later works of Williams has been a topic of discussion by at least four critics--Esther Merle Jackson, Louis Broussard, William R. Mueller, and Dan Isaac. These critics view his earlier plays as pessimistic and his later plays as optimistic. Miss Jackson and Mr. Broussard speak of Camino Real as the turning point. According to Miss Jackson, "In Camino Real, Williams' vision of the protagonist seems to have undergone major change. For he embodies . . . more radical conditions of courage than those which appear in the protagonists of his earlier works."[6] Mr. Broussard concurs with Miss Jackson: "The theme of Camino Real finds illustration in none of the author's plays. . . . Examined comparatively, Camino Real becomes the playwright's prescription for the character failures presented in his other plays."[7] Professor William R. Mueller's discussion of Tennessee Williams' "new direction" begins at a point later than Camino Real. He indicates that the two most recent major plays, The Night of the Iguana and The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, reflect a transition between "dramas of description and those of prescription. . . . Both . . . are concerned not so much with life's arbitrariness as with life's meaning and with the need of believing, if not in God, at least in somebody or something."[8] Mr. Dan Isaac, in addition to pointing out differences between earlier and later plays, claims that the later dramas uniquely embody an oriental conception of theology:

> The general assumption about Williams--indeed, a public myth that has such a fast grip on our fantasies that we are unwilling to admit it might not be true--is that he is repetitious to a fault and has written himself out. Even were this indictment true, Williams is nevertheless one of the few American dramatists whose work displays any evolution of thought toward the solving of a set of philosophic and religious mystic! . . . A form of Buddhism has come to replace Christianity as a source of valid religious authority and ethics.[9]

Apparently these critics have become aware of a larger pattern of hopefulness about man in the works of Williams.[10] The discussions of the eight major plays in the previous chapters confirm the judgment of those critics who detect a development in the later plays. At this point, therefore, we should be prepared to examine critically the thematic and dramatic consequences of this development.

Tennessee Williams' total work demonstrates clearly that, while he is concerned with fundamental theological problems of life, he has attempted but failed to supply a thematic structure which permits a successful resolution of the problems. Professor Nathan A. Scott's description of this failure among many modern writers is valid for Williams in particular:

> What the modern artist has most deeply needed are systems of value, appropriate to the experience of the age, in which his art could find a principle of order and unity. . . . He has inherited no traditional and widely accepted frame of values from his culture. . . . He has been condemned by the cultural circumstances of his time to draw from himself everything that forms and orders his art. The waters in which he has swum have been deep waters of his own mind into which he has descended to search for a clue to the principles by which the anarchy of experience might be controlled and given shape and significance.[11]

Professor Scott still believes that Christianity, as reflected in the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation, is appropriate and meaningful. But he carefully avoids saying that literature should reflect doctrine. Professor Scott is helpful at this point, however, only if one substitutes the phrase "the experience of the age." It is imperative, critically speaking, that Williams' thematic structure embody elements which sustain the lives and problems of those who inhabit his plays. Indeed, this is precisely the point of this chapter. Williams' use of Christian language and thought in the later plays may or may not be "appropriate to the experience of the age," but it is undoubtedly inappropriate for his characters. The proper procedural question to raise at this point, therefore, is: What is the nature of a thematic structure which might be appropriate for Williams' hero? To answer the question, let us review the situation of the hero with particular emphasis upon three fundamental theological problems--isolation, the absence of God, and death.

Tom Wingfield and Blanche Du Bois, as the first chapter describes them, are caught in a situation which prevents any semblance of community. Perhaps in The Glass Menagerie the potential of human community is reflected in the unusually tender dialogue of Tom and Amanda in Scene iv. The potential is never realized because Tom leaves home never to return. A Streetcar Named Desire reflects the situation of Blanche in images of hopelessness. Her life is collapsing as a result of her inability to resolve the tension between the flesh and the spirit. Stanley Kowalski, representative of American technocracy and brute animal force, conquers and destroys the fragile Blanche. Human community is not possible in the world of A Streetcar Named Desire precisely because the people who must participate in that community are torn from within and without by a larger spiritual problem--the flesh versus the spirit. Summer and Smoke, as Robert Emmet Jones has written, depicts Blanche before her catastrophe.[12] The problem of this play is like that of A Streetcar Named Desire--the flesh and the spirit. Although the ending of the play does not reveal the heroine in a state of dissolution, the point is basically the same: the flesh (summer) cannot identify with the spirit (smoke). They are eternally at war with each other. Thus the problem of isolation in the early plays is an unavoidable and believable fact of the characters' existence.

The theme of isolation as an unavoidable fact of life is present in subsequent dramas. But it gives way to a suggested solution--human community and compassion. After Camino Real most of the plays are concerned with solutions to isolation and other related problems--the absence of God and death.

The second major theological problem in the works of Williams is the absence of God or a savior. The Wingfields, Amanda in particular, wish for a messiah--that long "delayed but always expected something that we live for." Jim O'Connor is that "something" but he is incapable of redeeming the situation of the Wingfields. Blanche Du Bois relieves her despair by hoping that Shep Hundleigh will appear out of nowere and rescue her from Stanley and his bestial world. Blanche's messiah never arrives. In Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Brick uses alcohol as a means to overcome the anguish of the present. Big Daddy's point is well made: Brick's alcoholism in no way saves him from reality; rather, it is only another means of avoiding the present. The pathetic inhabitants of Camino Real eagerly await the arrival of the "Fugitivo." Yet ironically, only a select few are able to board this agency of salvation which crashes and becomes an instrument of destruction. In Sweet Bird of Youth, a play not discussed in this dissertation, a heckler shouts to the crowds surrounding a politician who calls himself a "messiah from the hills":

> I don't believe it. I believe that the silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the whole world is lost because of. I think it's yet to be broken to any man, living or yet lived on earth--no exceptions.[13]

Sebastian Venable of _Suddenly Last Summer_ had a vision of God as a destroyer rather than as a creator and redeemer. Shannon, before he received the counsel of Hannah Jelkes in _The Night of the Iguana_, also spoke of the impotency of God to redeem the present.

The awareness of the reality of death constitutes a third theological theme in the plays. The extended dialogue of Brick and Big Daddy in _Cat on a Hot Tin Roof_ reveals their discovery of a two-fold truth: that Big Daddy is dying of cancer and that Brick has willed a spiritual death by refusing to live within his historically-conditioned situation. The omnipresent streetcleaners--consistent symbols of death--represent the ultimate goal of those who remain on the Camino Real. The most recent dramas, _The Night of the Iguana_ and _The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore_, more precisely than the earlier dramas, focus upon death as a fundamental problem of life. Shannon's agonizing struggle to gain belief is contrapuntal with the dying Nonno's attempt to complete his poem about the courage to face death. _The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore_ obviously describes Mrs. Goforth's pain-filled last days of life. Christopher's mission, as an "angel of death," is to prepare Mrs. Goforth for her death.

If isolation, the absence of God, and death are universal problems in the plays previously discussed, it would appear appropriate to notice solutions to these problems whenever they are proposed by the author. The first fact to acknowledge after reviewing the plays is that, roughly speaking, before Camino Real no solutions are presented.[14] We described The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire in a chapter entitled "The Hero in Isolation." Each play primarily unfolds the desperate circumstances of the characters. While there is perhaps a vague memory suggestive of hopefulness at the end of The Glass Menagerie, we concluded that hope is extinguished in A Streetcar Named Desire. Summer and Smoke and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof are experiments in despair. The uniqueness of these and other plays written after A Streetcar Named Desire is that they are experiments with both the nature of despair and solutions for it. Summer and Smoke concludes that there is no possible reconciliation of flesh and spirit. Brick and Big Daddy in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof discover that at the heart of life there is always the inescapable truth of death.

Camino Real and Suddenly Last Summer are experiments in despair; yet they are distinctive in that they contain positive affirmations made in the face of life's difficult problems. In Camino Real the affirmation quite simply is that man somehow should affirm the redemptive potential of human kindness and sympathy even in the face of isolation, God's absence, and death. As Don Quixote affirms at the play's end, "The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks!" Williams appears to be suggesting that this sentimental affirmation is capable of resolving the issues confronted by Kilroy and others who inhabit Camino Real. Our discussion of the play in Chapter Two demonstrates that, in this respect, the play falls short of believable drama.

Suddenly Last Summer, a curious combination of allegory and sensationalism, lacks credibility. The allegorical meaning of the drama is explained by the heroine, Catharine Holly; it has to do with the consequences of possessing a demonic vision of God and man. She points out that Sebastian (and modern man as well) tried to "spell God's name with the wrong alphabet blocks." Instead of dealing further with the question of God, however, Catharine turns her attention to another problem of special concern--the interrelationship of mankind. Life, she says, may be as desperate as passengers aboard a ship which has struck an iceberg at sea. Everyone is sinking, but, as she says, that is "no reason for everyone drowning hating everyone drowning." In spite of God's absence, says Catharine, one should affirm a positive life of community in which people accept each other even though they all share the common fate of death. If a major problem of Suddenly Last Summer is God's relationship to human experience, then we must conclude that the question is unanswered by the playwright. Perhaps the point of the drama is that man should learn to accept the truth that God is absent--something which those around Catharine apparently are unwilling to do. Suddenly Last Summer is similar to Camino Real in respect to the playwright's vagueness about solutions which, although literally present in the drama, do not in any real sense relate to the problems which they should solve. Therefore the problems of isolation, God's absence, and death remain.

The two most recent plays discussed, as several critics have acknowledged, are explicitly theological.[15] Once again the basic problems of the characters in these plays are isolation, the question of God (or belief), and death. In The Night of the Iguana, Shannon's main problem is "the oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or someone." Hannah's emphasis upon belief is intended as a solution to Shannon's state of disbelief. Earlier he tells her that "Western theologies, the whole mythology of them, are based on the concept of God as a *senile* delinquent . . .I will not and cannot continue to conduct services in praise and worship of this . . . angry, petulant old man" (Act II). While Hannah correctly senses that Shannon has a problem of belief, she is nevertheless incapable of providing an answer to this specific problem. The logic of her speeches is that Shannon's problem concerning God may be resolved if he simply reaches out for other people. The clearest example of this logic is found in the second half of a passage quoted earlier. The passage is quoted in full:

> SHANNON:
> What is my problem, Miss Jelkes?
>
> HANNAH:
> The oldest one in the world--the need to believe in something or in someone--almost anyone--almost anything . . . something.
>
> SHANNON:
> Your voice sounds hopeless about it.
>
> HANNAH:
> No, I'm not hopeless about it. In fact, I've discovered something to believe in.
>
> SHANNON:
> Something like . . .God?
>
> HANNAH:
> No.
>
> SHANNON:
> What?
>
> HANNAH:
> Broken gates between people so they can reach each other, even if its just for one night only.
> . . . .
> A little understanding exchanged between them, a wanting to help each other through nights like this.
> (Act III)

Later in this act Hannah explains that, while she is "unsure" about God, she is nevertheless beginning to feel that God may be seen in the faces of suffering humanity.

The larger meaning of Hannah's advice would appear to be that the basic problems of man are solved when one lives in some kind of community with others even if it is only minimal. But Shannon's primary problem is not isolation but belief or lack of it. Hannah insists that he deal with the problem of disbelief with the answer for human isolation--community. The logic is reminiscent of that used by Catharine in Suddenly Last Summer; she raises the question about Sebastian's demonic vision of God and then answer~~s~~ it with a simplistic statement about the importance of caring for other people.

During the extended conversation between Hannah and Shannon, another fundamental problem--death--is resolved quietly by the aged poet, Nonno. Everyone in the play including Nonno knows that he is at death's door. His concern throughout the play is to complete his final poem--one which explores a way of looking a death. The conluding lines of the poem reveal that Nonno's solution to death is "Courage."

> O Courage could you not as well
> Select a second place to dwell,
> Not only in that golden tree
> But in the frightened heart of me?

Nonno's struggle to complete the poem parallels Shannon's efforts to understand and justify his existence. The purpose of Nonno's climactic poem would appear to be that of lending an air of calm resolve to the scene of Shannon's attempt to find something in which he can belief. Nonno is the only character who finds a satisfactory answer to his basic question. But the play is not about Nonno. The main character, Shannon, ignores the problem of belief and commits himself to a life of "community" with Maxine--a person who throughout the play is revealed as incapable of either understanding or empathy. Shannon's question of belief is left unanswered. One might argue that Hannah has substituted the human face for the divine image and thus redefines the question of belief. If Williams' point is that suffering humanity has replaced God, then he does not make it clear. Shannon's vigorous statements about God as a "senile delinquent" are not refuted by ignoring them.

Much of what has been said about The Night of the Iguana may be said about The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. The chief difference is that the basic problem of the latter play is death. Furthermore, the philosophy of Christopher is more nearly Christian than oriental, whereas Hannah's philosophy is an uneven combination of oriental, Christian and stoic thought. Christopher's mission apparently is to prepare Mrs. Goforth for death. The epigraph from Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" may mean for Williams that Mrs. Goforth is about to sail into eternity. Yet it is not clear whether Williams proposes that the solution to her problem--death--is some kind of eternal life. Williams' exact meaning is not clear in view of the fact that Christopher's mission has patently selfish origins. He visits Mrs. Goforth, just as he has visited other dying ladies, because it makes him feel "complete." He helps other people die not primarily because he has a special message for them, but because this activity saves him from a sense of "Unreality" and "Lostness." An uncritical reading of the play might lead one to say that it deals with a "Christ-giver" or "Christ-figure" who comes to prepare a dying aristocrat for eternal life. But Williams has not done this in The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. Mrs. Goforth's death is a vehicle for the realization of a vagrant poet's unusual need.

The play's meaning is further confused by the epigraph from Yeats's poem. Williams quotes the lines which contrast the decaying body with Byzantium's "artifice of eternity." The poem does not suggest the same kind of eternal life which the image of Christ represents. Rather, it is Yeats's specialized interpretation of art in opposition to nature. The poem suggests the rejection of the natural for an unusual kind of art; it is not simply an affirmation of eternal life in the face of death. It could very well be that Williams has misunderstood the poem. At any rate, the basic problem of the drama--death--is left unsolved. Yet the conclusion, particularly the communion scene, suggests that something has been resolved.

In the recent plays of hopefulness beyond despair, Tennessee Williams permits several errors

Williams commits several errors--the greatest of which is his misleading suggestion that the dramas have been resolved. The closest either play comes to resolution is the singular instance of Nonno's discovery of "Courage" in the face of death. But it is Nonno's solution and not Shannon's. The greatest problem of the play--Shannon's struggle for belief--actually is ignored.

The tendency to misuse dramatic devices appears as early as *Summer and Smoke*. In our previous discussion of this play, we pointed out that the characters are stripped of their authenticity even though their allegorical trappings are rich in symbolic value. To be successful, allegory should be, in the words of Edwin Honig, "symbolic in method" and "realistic in aim and in the content of its perception."[16] The unreality of *Camino Real* and *Suddenly Last Summer* is a clear indication that Williams prefers sentimentality over authenticity. The only conclusion to be drawn from all of this is that, despite Williams' desperate attempts to the contrary, there are no believable solutions for the terrifying problems of his characters.

Another serious weakness in the hopeful plays of Williams is his eccentric usage of theological materials. In the most recent plays the religious affirmations are an uneven mixture of Christian and oriental thought. There is an oriental emphasis upon passivity and acceptance. Hannah, for example, acknowledges that it was in the East that she discovered her approach to life.

Yet, in the same breath, she identifies this approach with the Christian tradition. Christopher Flanders also demonstrates a superficial combination of an Indian Swami's teaching about silence with the ideal of Christ which reminds one of the concept of Jesus as a "man for others." In addition to these, there are numerous passages suggestive of a generalized Christian sentiment. As we have suggested, Williams uses these theological fragments to suggest falsely that his plays have been resolved. The failure which results from Williams'employment of theological materials is similar in kind to that which results from his misuse of allegory. His dramas since _Camino Real_ move steadily away from the real to the unreal; from the believable to the illogical and incredible; from historical problems to non-historical solutions; from relevant human concerns to irrelevant and sentimental cliches.

That Williams is concerned with important theological issues cannot be denied. Human isolation, God's absence, and death are fundamental concerns of Christian theology. Williams obviously recognizes this or he would not consistently use Christian language and themes in many of his recent works. Yet he has not grasped the fundamental logic inherent in the theological issues. He has not found an adequate way to deal with the problems experienced by his characters even though he employs dramatic techniques (such as false resolutions) to suggest otherwise.

The great virtue of the early plays of Williams is that they are believable and concern real people. The strength and dignity of the early hero is that, despite social and psychological pressures, he does not ultimately ignore the facts of his life. Blanche's despair is a legitimate and credible response to the nature of her existence. Tom's acute sense of the disgusting aspects of life make him what few of the latter heroes are--truthful. Blanche's and Tom's anxiety is far more commendable than the religious-sounding cliches of the hero in the later plays.

Williams' tendency to ignore the facts of historical experience is a misconception of the writer who would give us a dramatic representation of human existence. It is likewise a dubious procedure in terms of Christian theology. The uncritical and non-historical quality of Williams' understanding of community lends itself to Gnosticism. Oscar Cullmann, the protestant theologian, describes Christianity as a religion which not only accepts time and history but affirms that redemption must take place in history if it is truly redemption.[17] (This assessment of the Judaeo-Christian tradition has been made in a different context by the phenomenologist of religion, Mircea Eliade.[18]) The classic misconceptions of Christianity came at the time when Hellenic oriented theologians overlooked history and escaped into eternity. Gnostic systems consistently deny the Old Testament's affirmation that God acts in history, and deny as well the New Testament's kerygma that human redemption occurs in history. The later plays of Tennessee Williams, viewed in this perspective, deny the realities of life; they supply irrelevant solutions to the problems of historical existence.

Tennessee Williams' theological dimension--the overall thematic development from a tragic to a comic view of life--does not contribute to either effective drama or adequate theology. Despite the fact that the hero achieves a limited kind of community, his problems--isolation, God's absence, and death--are not resolved in a convincing manner. Williams' difficulty, shared by many modern writers who would project theological themes, may be unavoidable. Perhaps the only meaningful action for the hero in isolation would be to wait. But Williams, more often than not, is a writer whose plays are in the tradition of Chekhov and Ibsen, not in the tradition of the theatre of the absurd or the literature of silence. Some argue that Williams' greatest attribute is his ability to produce conventional, realistic drama. Indeed he succeeds most of all when he describes loneliness, frustration, and the unavoidable anxiety of human existence. But in his later works he attempts more than description. He proposes solutions. His elementary theological solutions contribute to dramatic distortion and thematic irrelevance. This may tend to validate Gabriel Vahanian's conclusion that "Christian thought . . .no longer is relevant to the situation of our post-Christian age and its cultural postulates."[19] This dissertation contends, however, that Williams' failure is not primarily due to his use or misuse of a system of theology. Rather, it appears that the major difficulty is his apparent inability to resolve in a logical manner the real, live problems of his characters . Nevertheless, the overall hopefulness of Williams cannot be denied and there is good reason to believe that his forthcoming works will continue to reflect it.[20] It may yet be that Tennessee Williams will somehow successfully incorporate within his dramas a theological vision which is relevant to the characters who inhabit them.

AN AFTERWORD REGARDING METHODOLOGY

When I first began thinking seriously about the subject of this dissertation in the Spring of 1966, I was fairly certain that I could demonstrate how Tennessee Williams embodies in his works specific doctrines of Christianity. After a few months of research, I was able to inform my graduate advisor, Dr. David H. Hesla, that Williams' total work consisted of an evolution of a concept of community similar to the New Testament's *koinonia*. I proposed that, although Williams' hero usually is morally bankrupt, he nevertheless possesses the spiritual treasure of the "picaresque saint."

Research, I confess, is the enemy of first bright thoughts. By the Spring of 1968 I was convinced that, while Williams' characters demonstrate an understanding of human compassion, there is no special reason to label this concept "Christian." Indeed, there are enough passages to suggest, particularly in the later plays, that oriental thought and stoicism are sources of this concept--to say nothing of the author's undefined, yet abundant, sentimentality. Thus it became impossible to make a critical claim that Williams' works uniquely exhibited a concept of Christian community.

I was not fully convinced of the irrelevance of my original idea until I discovered, thanks to my advisor's persistent objections, that the later works which overtly embody religious elements are laden with thematic inconsistencies and dramatic faults. Instead of applauding the theological elements in these plays, I began to condemn them as irrelevant and sentimental. I found that Williams was using religion as a means of avoiding the difficult task of truly resolving his characters' difficulties. Devoid of my original intention, I submit the dissertation with the conviction that I have at least demonstrated in a specific manner what some critics have asserted: Williams' later works are indeed inferior to his earlier ones.

Not only did my research destroy a possible "contibution" to the field of literature and theology as I once imagined it. It also convinced me that some scholars in this area of study go about their work with presuppositions inimical to sound literary scholarship. A fundamental presupposition is that a Christian aesthetic is not only possible but exists as a corollary of any systematic theological system. For example, Professor John Killinger's book, The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature, implies that modern writers would be "better" if they could successfully incorporate Christian doctrines within their works. Mr. Killinger writes: "Theology . . . must always continue to ask hard questions of the creative arts. While allowing them their integrity and independence of existence as art, it still must press insistently upon them to 'give an answer' for the faith that is in them."[1] As I argue earlier in the introduction, this position would appear to encourage one to use Christian theology as external criteria in the evaluation of literature. If for no other reason than this, it should be seriously questioned.

At the present time I conclude that Christianity or any ideology does not contribute significantly to the criticism of literature when it is used as an external criterion. My reason is not simply that the theology tends to violate the "autonomy" of literature, but for a more fundamental reason. External criteria, used deductively, have an effect upon the process of reading and evaluating literature. As Northrop Frye in Anatomy of Criticism helpfully suggests, the study of literature is not a deductive but an inductive science.[2]

This position is not unique among literary critics. In a similar manner, William K. Wimsatt's essays in The Verbal Icon persuasively argue that neither the author's intention nor the critic's point of view should stand in between the critic and the text.[3] These points about the role of the critic are, of course, basic presuppositons of most serious literary scholars. Yet those who employ Christian theology in an external manner often produce homilies under the guise of criticism.[4]

There is a subtler and more complex presupposition apparent in the works of some theological critics. I am thinking specifically of Paul Tillich's famous "method of correlation." Tillich suggests that the theologian should explain the "contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence."[5] Tillich's proposal has been applied with great sophistication and success by Nathan A. Scott, Jr. Professor Scott writes: "It is the task of theology to establish the questions that are proposed out of man's cultural existence and the answers to those questions that are given in the kerygma."[6] In theory, if not always in practice, this approach implies that literature exists for the sake of theology's convenience. The problem here is that a work of literature often not only raises questions but answers them as well. If the writer gives no answer, then the task of the critic--regardless of his theology--would seem to be that of understanding the importance of this fact in the work at hand. I was tempted to use Tillich in my concluding chapter. It occurred to me that perhaps Williams was supplying the wrong theological answers and, if he had known more Christian theology, he could have resolved his characters' problems. There is a great deal of truth in this thought, particularly in terms of Williams' thematic difficulties in the later works. Yet, as a critic of literature, I could only point to Williams' misuse of theology. If the critic supplies "correct" answers for the characters' questions, he actually is rewriting the plays; this, fortunately, is not the task of any critic. If a "method of correlation" is used in literary criticism, it must be the author's own method: What is the answer, within the work, to the questions of his characters? Indeed, it was this question which gave rise to the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

Despite my unwillingness to utilize Christian doctrines in the evaluation of these eight plays by

Tennessee Williams, I nevertheless think of this dissertation as an exercise in literature and theology. The characters who inhabit the plays of Tennessee Williams live with theological problems. I have suggested that three basic issues in Williams' major works are human isolation, the absence of God, and the reality of death. These categories are theological because Williams' dramas depict them as such. I have tried to demonstrate that Williams' efforts to resolve these issues in the later plays are futile. The failure is apparent primarily in the illogical nature of his solutions. This is indeed a commentary upon Williams' conception of religion, but it is fundamentally a commentary upon his craft. In summary, I think of this dissertation as an exercise in literature and theology because it is a work which explores the theological dimension in the plays. While there is not a great deal to be said for the quality of published criticism of Williams' works, one cannot help but ask why critics have largely ignored this particular dimension of the works.

The relative lack of critical awareness of the theological elements in the works of Tennessee Williams is probably due to incomplete criticism. If the field of literature and theology has accomplished anything within the past twenty years, it has come through the theological critics' persistent demand for complete criticism. By "complete criticism" I mean the sort of procedure which notices the full range of human experience contained within a literary work. This is undoubtedly what R. W. B. Lewis meant when he wrote of the importance of paying attention to "those phases of a work of literature in which what have to be called religious considerations are overtly or secretively paramount."[7] A complete criticism of Williams' plays must take seriously this appearance of "religious considerations," for they are undeniably present.

The critic whose background includes theological studies seems especially prepared to take note of those aspects of literature in which religious elements are present. Yet his background does not give him a special standard for judging the relative worth of literature. The student of theology and literature may have strong personal motives for involving himself in this discipline; yet, whatever his motivation, the goal of this discipline ultimately is the goal of the arts and sciences: the pursuit of a more complete understanding of human experience.

Perhaps a great deal of the misunderstanding about the relationship between theology and literature stems from the medieval idea that theology is "queen" of the sciences. H. Richard Niebuhr once attempted to correct this by saying that theology is not queen but servant.[8] Niebuhr still relegates theology to a privileged, if humble, position. A better formula for the relationship of theology to the arts and sciences would be to disregard thinking of learning in terms of disciplines. Since this ideal appears unattainable at the moment, maybe this statement will serve our purposes: Theology--neither queen nor servant but fellow laborer in the field of the humanities.

If one will grant that theology is a humanistic discipline, there are some fundamental ways in which literature and theology relate. Consider, for example, the areas of textual criticism, historical criticism, and linguistics. Theology shares with these branches of literary scholarship certain techniques as well as a body of information. There is one sense in which the Biblical scholar and the literary critic do precisely the same thing whenever they examine written documents. The techniques used in the study of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land are just as useful for the student of II Isaiah.

Poetry is poetry regardless of its origin.[9] Furthermore, the theologian's historical information provides him with a body of knowledge which the average literary critic does not have at his disposal. Here theology makes a direct contribution to the study of literature. (I am thinking specifically of Roland M. Frye's book, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine.)[10] In addition to these possible relationships between literature and theology, I would add that a student of theology is accustomed to dealing with certain types of problems (God, belief, death, alienation, community, and many others) which, while present in literature, often go unnoticed by even the most astute literary critic.

Having attempted to explore the question of methodology, I admit that I have not given up completely the idea of a Christian aesthetic, even though the problem of external criteria seems unavoidable. After further exploration of the function of language and the nature of theology, I may change my mind. Now I maintain that the most profitable methodology for the field of literature and theology would have one begin with the careful study of a particular text. It is of paramount importance that the author's theological dimension be of his own making and not an artificial structure imposed by the critic.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 186.

[2] Frye, p. 186.

[3] Frye, pp. 163-86.

[4] Frye, p. 35.

[5] Chronologically speaking, Camino Real (1953) should come before Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955). Since Williams' works often appear originally as short stories and one act plays, it is difficult to attach a great deal of importance to the order of Broadway production, particularly when--as in this case--only two years separates these plays.

[6] Tennessee Williams, Suddenly Last Summer (New York, 1958), Scene iv.

[7] Randall Stewart, American Literature and Christian Doctrine (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1958).

[8] Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier (New York, 1958). Also see Rehearsals of Discomposure: Alienation and Reconciliation in Modern Literature (New York, 1952).

[9] John Killinger, The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature (New York, 1963).

[10] Herbert Weisinger, statement made in panel at "Conference on Literature and Theology," Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, November 18, 1967.

[11] R. W. B. Lewis, Trials of the Word (New Haven, 1965), p. 97.

Chapter One

[1] Tennessee Williams, The Glass Menagerie (New York, 1945), Scene i. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[2] Sam Bluefarb, "The Glass Menagerie: Three Visions of Time," College English, XXIV (April, 1963), 513-18. While his discussion of Amanda's past-consciousness is helpful, Mr. Bluefarb tends to stereotype Jim and Tom as figures of the future.

[3] Bluefarb, p. 516.

[4] Joseph Wood Krutch, American Drama Since 1918 (New York, 1965), p. 326.

[5] Richard B. Vowles, "Tennessee Williams: The World of His Imagery," Tulane Drama Review, III (December, 1958), 51-56.

[6] Signi Falk, Tennessee Williams (New York, 1961), p. 72.

[7] Paul J. Hurley, "Tennessee Williams: Critic of American Society" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1962).

[8] Signi Falk explains that the "magic" is due to the character's ability to evoke "emotional excitement." See Falk, p. 72. Esther Merle Jackson attributes the dramatist's success to the presence of a "scaffold" and a "rational schema designed to interpret the moment of vision in the language of reason." See The Broken World of Tennessee Williams (Milwaukee, 1966), p. 42.

[9] Robert Emmet Jones, "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines," Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), 211-19.

[10] Tennessee Williams, A Streetcar Named Desire (New York, 1947), Scene i. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[11] Falk, p. 175.

[12] Mary McCarthy, "Streetcar Called Success" in Sights and Spectacles: 1937-1956 (New York, 1956), pp. 132 ff.

[13] George Jean Nathan, "Review of A Streetcar Named Desire," Theatre Book of the Year, 1947-1948 (New York, 1948), p. 165.

[14] Horst Frenz and Ulrich Weisstein, "Tennessee Williams and His German Critics," Symposium, XIV (Winter, 1960), 260.

[15] Benjamin Nelson, Tennessee Williams (New York, 1961), p. 143.

[16] Hart Crane, "The Broken Tower" in Collected Poems of Hart Crane, ed. by William Frank (New York, 1958), pp. 193-94.

[17] Hari Singh, "Streetcar: A Reinterpretation" (unpublished manuscript, American Studies Research Center, Hyderabad, India, 1966), p. 14.

[18] Elia Kazan, "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire," in Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre, ed. by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York, 1963), pp. 365, 370.

[19] Kazan, p. 365.

[20] Kazan, p. 370.

[21] Tennessee Williams, One Arm and Other Stories (New York, 1948), p. 170.

[22] Norman J. Fedder, The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams (The Hague, 1966), p. 86.

[23] Fedder, p. 86.

[24] See Hurley's dissertation. See also Frenz and Weisstein for an overstatement of the ideological opposites in these plays. Both discussions overlook the ambiguity cited above.

[25] Falk, pp. 163-90.

Chapter Two

[1] Quoted by Ted Kalem in "The Angel of the Odd," Time, LXXIX (March 9, 1962), 53.

[2] Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery" in The Modern Critical Spectrum, ed. by Gerald J. Goldberg and Nancy M. Goldberg (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 74.

[3] Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," The Nation, CLXVII (October 23, 1948), 473-74.

[4] Frenz and Weisstein, "German Critics," p. 258.

[5] Quoted by Nancy M. Tischler, Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan (New York, 1961), p. 162.

[6] Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke (New York, 1948), Scene vii. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[7] Fedder, Influence of D. H. Lawrence, p. 91.

[8] Nelson, Tennessee Williams, p. 123.

[9] Edwin Honig, in phenomenological terms, explains that allegory ideally tends to unify the work into a "real" fiction: "As concept allegory serves to define or devise states of separateness and togetherness, oppositions and unities. But in the practical completion of its design, the allegorical work dispenses with the concept of allegory, as something preconceived, in order to achieve the fullest fictional manifestation of life. Allegory, which is symbolic in method, is realistic in aim and in the content of its perception." See Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (New York, 1966), p. 180.

[10] Tennessee Williams, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (New York, 1955), Act II. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[11] Critics usually regard the drama as a vehicle for a discussion of homosexuality. See Vowles, "Williams: World of His Imagery," p. 54. See also Eric Bentley, *What is Theatre?* (New York, 1956), p. 59.

[12] See especially William Becker, "Reflections on Three New Plays," *Hudson Review*, VIII (Summer, 1955), 271.

[13] Roger Ashton, "Correspondence: Back on a Hot Tin Roof," *New Republic*, CXXXII (April 25, 1955), 23.

[14] Bentley, p. 59.

[15] Paul J. Hurley, "Tennessee Williams: The Playwright as Social Critic," *Theatre Annual*, XXI (1964), 44.

[16] Tennessee Williams, "Afterword" in *Three Plays of Tennessee Williams* (New York, 1959), p. 163.

[17] Jackson, *Broken World of Williams*, pp. 110-11.

[18] Jackson, p. 116.

[19] Quoted by Frenz and Weisstein, p. 275. Below is a translation into English: "Historically speaking, up until the present time [with the exception of Williams and Strindberg] it has been the privileged distinction of Spanish theatre to present life as a dream--being as appearance--thereby to transform dreams, allegories, and abstractions into the most full-blooded dynamism."

[20] Jackson, p. 121 (from her manuscript of the annual Bochum festival of the arts).

[21] Jackson, pp. 121-22.

[22] Williams, "Afterword," p. 159.

[23] Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real* (Norfolk, Conn., 1953), Prologue. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[24] Harold Clurman, *Lies Like Truth* (New York, 1958), p. 84.

[25] Frederick L. Gwyn and Joseph L. Blotner, (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1959), p. 13.

[26] See Leonard Quirino, "The Darkest Celebrations of Tennessee Williams: A Study of *Battle of Angels*, *Orpheus Descending*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Camino Real*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Suddenly Last Summer*" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1964), pp. 119-20.

[27] John von Szeliski, "Tennessee Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity," *Western Humanities Review*, XX (Summer, 1966), 208.

[28] Paul J. Hurley, "*Suddenly Last Summer* as 'Morality Play,'" *Modern Drama*, IX (February, 1966), 392.

[29] Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer* (New York, 1958), Scene i. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[30] See James R. Hurt, "Suddenly Last Summer: Williams and Melville," Modern Drama, III (February, 1961), 396-400.

[31] Several critics have failed to see this. One notable example is Signi Falk who writes: "Williams has paced the recollection of the Sebastian Venable story to raise emotions rather than to encourage thought. His fascination with brutality . . . suggests the extent to which he will go to create theatrical shocks." See Falk, p. 154.

[32] Hurley, "'Morality Play,'" p. 393.

[33] Ibid.

[34] This has been discussed briefly earlier in the chapter. See the discussion of Summer and Smoke and Honig's description of allegory.

Chapter Three

[1] Tennessee Williams, The Night of the Iguana (New York, 1962), Act III. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[2] Fedder, Influence of D. H. Lawrence, p. 109. See also John M. Bradbury: "Twisted love and guilt are primary themes. . . . [Williams'] concern with misplaced, frustrated, and distorted love cannot be exorcised." Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960 (Chapel Hill, 1963), p. 195.

[3] Williams, One Arm, pp. 169-98.

[4] Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Vol.I, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge,1955), p.347.

[5] Tennessee Williams, The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore (New York, 1964), p. 1. Hereafter, citations will be given in the text following the quotation.

[6] See the discussion by Fedder, pp. 117-19.

[7] William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzahtium," The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats (New York, 1949), p. 223. Following is the complete poem:

I
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
--Those dying generations--at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackeral-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.
II
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.
III
O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV
Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

[8] D. J. Gordon and Ian Fletcher, "Byzantium," Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by John Unterecker (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), p. 136.

[9] Ibid.

[10] This weakness has been noted in the discussion of plays as early as Camino Real. Earlier it was suggested that this failure results from his misuse of allegory. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation is a discussion of Williams' apparent misunderstanding of Yeats's poem. This also has a bearing upon his uncertain symbolic structure.

[11] William R. Mueller, "Tennessee Williams: A New Direction?" The Christian Century, LXXXI (October 14, 1964), 1271.

[12] Dan Isaac,""A Streetcar Named Desire--or Death?" The New York Times, February 18, 1968, Section 2, p.7.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Mueller, p. 1272.

[16] As has been remarked in the introduction to this dissertation, comedy characteristically depicts the movement of the hero from isolation to community, from despair to hope. See Frye, Anatomy, pp. 163-85.

Chapter Four

[1] Nathan A. Scott, Jr., The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological Horizon of Modern Literature (New Haven, 1966), p. 216.

[2] Falk, Tennessee Williams, pp. 163-64.

[3] Falk, p. 168.

[4] Bradbury, Renaissance in the South, pp. 192-93.

[5] See the following articles: Harold C. Gardiner, "Is Williams' Vision Myopic?" *America*, CIII (July 30, 1960), 495-96; Kenneth Tynan, "American Blues: The Plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams," *Encounter*, II (May, 1954), 13-19; Mary McCarthy, "Streetcar Called Success," *Sights and Spectacles* (New York, 1956), p. 132.

[6] Jackson, *Broken World of Williams*, p. 124.

[7] Louis Broussard, *American Drama: Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1962), p. 116.

[8] Mueller, "Williams: A New Direction?" p. 1271.

[9] Isaac, "Streetcar Named Desire--or Death?" pp. 1,7.

[10] The claim that there is a theological dimension in Williams' works certainly would come as no surprise to the playwright. That his theatre has a social and moral concern has been the topic of several essays and interviews. In the Spring of 1967, for example, Williams read Walter Starcke's manuscript dealing with Christian mysticism (similar to that of Teilhard de Chardin). Afterwards he openly endorsed the book for Harper and Row with the following statement: "With simple and deeply personal eloquence, Walter Starcke explores for us a way out of and above the finally fatal world of materialism." See endorsement on dustjacket of Walter Starcke, *This Double Thread* (New York, 1967). (The story of the endorsement and Williams' friendship with Starcke comes from a personal letter from Walter Starcke to Delma E. Presley, September 4, 1967.)n Williams' social and moral concern, it should be noted, is not a recent development as far as he is concerned. As early as 1951 he wrote: "The great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power deliberately to choose certain moral values by which to live as steadfastly as if he, too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time. See Williams, "The Timeless World of a Play," in *Three Plays*, p. 6.

[11] Scott, *The Broken Center*, pp. 6,7,8.

[12] Jones, "Williams' Heroines," pp. 211-19.

[13] Tennessee Williams, Sweet Bird of Youth (New York, 1959), Act II. This play is not included in the dissertation primarily because it is not considered, either by the author or by critics, as a major work. Furthermore, many of the themes in this play are dramatized more successfully in plays discussed previously.

[14] The idea of development is thematic, not always chronological.

[15] See pp. 112 ff. of dissertation.

[16] Honig's point is considered in chapter two.

[17] Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, translated by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia, 1951), pp. 27 ff.

[18] Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959), See chapter four, "The Terror of History."

[19] Gabriel Vahanian, Wait Without Idols (New York, 1964.

[20] Letter, Walter Starcke to Delma Eugene Presley, September 4, 1967. Personal Copy.

An Afterword Regarding Methodology

[1] Killinger, Failure of Theology, pp. 15-16.

[2] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 3-29.

[3] William K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (New York, 1964), pp. 3-39, 276-79.

[4] Killinger, for example, applauds William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury because it contains an ecclesiology (Dilsey's Easter service) similar to that held by the theologian, P. T. Forsyth. See Killinger, pp. 92-93.

[5] Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (3 vols.; Chicago, 1951-63), I, 60.

[6] Scott, Literature and Religious Frontier, p. ix.

[7] R. W. B. Lewis, Trials of the Word, p. vii.

[8] H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (New York, 1960), pp. 93-99.

[9] The validity of this proposal has been demonstrated by Dan Otto Via. See The Parables: The Literary and Existential Dimension (Philadelphia, 1967).

[10] Roland M. Frye, Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (Princeton, 1963).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Published Works of Tennessee Williams

A. Poetry

In the Winter of the Cities. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1944.

B. Fiction

One Arm and Other Stories. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1948.

The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone. New York: New Directions, 1950.

Hard Candy: A Book of Stories. New York: New Directions, 1954.

The Knightly Quest and Other Stories. New York: New Directions, 1966.

C. Collections of Plays

27 Wagons Full of Cotton. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1946.

American Blues. New York: Dramatists' Play Service, 1948.

Four Plays: The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, Summer and Smoke, and *Camino Real*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1956.

Three Players of a Summer Game. London: Secker and Warburg, 1960.

Three Plays of Tennessee Williams: The Rose Tattoo, Camino Real, Sweet Bird of Youth. New York: New Directions, 1959.

D. Individual Plays

Battle of Angels. New York: New Directions, 1945.

The Glass Menagerie. New York: Random House, 1945.

A Streetcar Named Desire. New York: New Directions, 1947.

Summer and Smoke. New York: New Directions, 1948.

The Rose Tattoo. New York: New Directions, 1951.

Camino Real. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1953.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. New York: New Directions, 1955.

Orpheus Descending (with *Battle of Angels*). New York: New Directions, 1958.

Suddenly Last Summer. New York: New Directions, 1958.

Sweet Bird of Youth. New York: New Directions, 1959.

Period of Adjustment. New York: New Directions, 1960.

The Night of the Iguana. New York: New Directions, 1962.

The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore. New York: New Directions, 1964.

The Eccentricities of a Nightingale. New York: New Directions, 1964.

E. Other Published Works by Tennessee Williams

I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix. With a Note by Frieda Lawrence. Norfolk, Conn.: J. Laughlin, 1951.

You Touched Me. Written in collaboration with Donald Windham. Boston: W. H. Baker, 1946.

Baby Doll. A Film Play. New York: New Directions, 1956.

Lord Byron's Love Letters. A One Act Opera. New York: Ricordi, 1955.

II. Secondary Sources

A. Books

Bentley, Eric. *In Search of Theatre*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.

_____. *What is Theatre?* New York: Beacon Press, 1956.

Bradbury, John M. *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960.* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963.

Broussard, Louis. *American Drama: Contemporary Allegory from Eugene O'Neill to Tennessee Williams*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. New York: Pantheon, 1949.

Clurman, Harold. *Lies Like Truth*. New York: Macmillan, 1958.

Crane, Hart. *Complete Poems of Hart Crane*. Edited by William Frank. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

Cullmann, Oscar. *Christ and Time*. Translated by Floyd V. Filson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1951.

Dickinson, Emily. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Edited by Thomas H. Johnson. Vol. I. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955.

Donohue, Francis. *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1964.

Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper and Row, 1959.

Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.

Falk, Signi. Tennessee Williams. New Haven: College and University Press, 1961.

Fedder, Norman J. The Influence of D. H. Lawrence on Tennessee Williams. Vol. V of "Studies in American Literature." The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1966.

Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

Frye, Roland M. Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

Glicksberg, Charles I. The Tragic Vision in Twentieth Century Literature. With a Preface by Harry T. Moore. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963.

Gwynn, Frederick L. and Blotner, Joseph, eds. Faulkner in the University. Charlottesville, Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 1959.

Hassan, Ihab. The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967.

Honig, Edwin. Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Jackson, Esther Merle. The Broken World of Tennessee Williams. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.

Killinger, John. The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature. New York: Abingdon Press, 1963.

Krieger, Murray. The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretation. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. American Drama Since 1918. New York: Braziller, 1957.

______. The Modern Temper. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1929.

Lewis, R. W. B. Trials of the Word: Essays in American Literature and the Humanistic Tradition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965.

Lynch, William F. *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.

McCarthy, Mary. *Sights and Spectacles, 1937-1956*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956.

Nelson, Benjamin. *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Oblensky, 1961.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.

Olson, Elder. *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961.

Rahv, Philip. *The Myth and the Powerhouse*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.

Scott, Nathan A., Jr. *The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological Horizon of Modern Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

______. *Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier*. New York: Harper, 1958.

______. *Rehearsals of Discomposure: Alienation and Reconciliation in Modern Literature*. New York: King's Crown Press, 1952.

Sievers, David. *Freud on Broadway*. New York: Hermitage House, 1955.

Starcke, Walter. *This Double Thread*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Stewart, Randall. *American Literature and Christian Doctrine*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: The Louisiana State University Press, 1958.

TeSelle, Sallie McFague. *Literature and the Christian Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63.

Tischler, Nancy M. *Tennessee Williams: Rebellious Puritan*. New York: Citadel Press, 1961.

Yeats, William Butler. *The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1949.

Vahanian, Gabriel. *Wait Without Idols*. New York: George Braziller, 1964.

Via, Dan Otto. *The Parables: The Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967.

Wimsatt, William K. *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. New York: Noonday Press, 1964.

B. Articles

Ashton, Roger. "Correspondence: Back on a Hot Tin Roof." *New Republic*, CXXXII (April 25, 1955), 23.

Asselineau, Roger. "Tennessee Williams ou la nostalgie de la purete." *Etudes anglaises*, X (October-December, 1957), 431-43.

Becker, William. "Reflections on Three New Plays." *Hudson Review*, VIII (Summer, 1955), 258-72.

Bernard, Kenneth. "The Mercentile Mr. Kowalski." *Discourse*, VII (Summer, 1964), 337-40.

Bluefarb, Sam. "*The Glass Managerie*: Three Visions of Time." *College English*, XXIV (April, 1963), 513-18.

Brooking, Jack. "Directing *Summer and Smoke*: An Existentialist Approach." *Modern Drama*, II (February, 1960), 377-85.

Brooks, Charles. "The Comic Tennessee Williams." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, XLIV (October, 1958), 275-81.

Brustein, Robert. "Sweet Bird of Success." *Encounter*, XII (June, 1959), 59-60.

______________. "Williams' Nebulous Nightmare." *Hudson Review*, XII (Summer, 1959), 255-60.

Carpenter, Charles A., Jr. and Cook, Elizabeth. "Addenda to Tennessee Williams: A Selected Bibliography." *Modern Drama*, II (December, 1959), 220-23.

Donoghue, Denis. "The Cocktail Party" in *T. S. Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Hugh Kenner. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962. pp. 173-86.

Dony, Nadine. "Tennessee Williams: A Selected Bibliography." *Modern Drama*, I (December, 1958), 181-91.

Fitch, Robert E. "La Mystique de la Merde." *New Republic*, CXXXV (September 3, 1956), 17-18.

Frenz, Horst and Weisstein, Ulrich. "Tennessee Williams and His German Critics." *Symposium*, XIV (Winter, 1960), 258-75.

Gardiner, Harold C. "Is Williams' Vision Myopic?" *America*, CIII (July 30, 1960), 495-96.

Gassner, John. "Tennessee Williams." *College English*, X (October, 1948), 1-7.

________. "Tragic Perspectives: A Sequence of Queries." *Tulane Drama Review*, II (May, 1958), 7-22.

Gordon, D. J. and Fletcher, Ian. "Byzantium," in *Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by John Unterecker. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963, pp. 131-38.

Heilman, Robert. "Tennessee Williams: Approach to Tragedy." *Southern Review*, I (Autumn, 1965), 770-90.

Hewes, Henry. "Broadway Postscript: Tennessee Williams--Last of Our Solid Gold Bohemians." *Saturday Review*, XXXVI (March 28, 1953), 25-27.

Hurley, Paul J. "*Suddenly Last Summer* as a Morality Play." *Modern Drama*, IX (February, 1966), 392-402.

________. "Tennessee Williams: The Playwright as Social Critic." Theatre Annual, XXI (1964), 40-56.

Hurt, James R. "Suddenly Last Summer: Williams and Melville." Modern Drama, III (February, 1961), 396-400.

Isaac, Dan B. "In Defense of Tennessee Williams." Religious Education, LIII (September-October, 1958), 452-53.

________. "A Streetcar Named Desire or Death?" New York Times, February 18, 1968. Section 2, pp. 1, 7.

Jones, Robert Emmet. "Tennessee Williams' Early Heroines." Modern Drama, II (December, 1959), 211-19.

Kalem, Ted. "The Angel of the Odd." Time, LXXIX (March 9, 1962), 53-60.

Kazan, Elia. "Notebook for A Streetcar Named Desire" in Directing the Play. Edited by Toby Cole and Helen Kritch Chinoy. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1953, pp. 296-310.

Kernan, Alvin B. "Truth and Dramatic Mode in the Modern Theatre: Chekhov, Pirandello and Williams." Modern Drama, I (September, 1958), 101-14.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Drama." The Nation, CLXVII (October 23, 1948), 473-74.

________. "Why the O'Neill Star is Rising." New York Times Magazine, March 19, 1961, pp. 36-37, 108.

Kunkel, Francis L. "Tennessee Williams and the Death of God." Commonweal, LXXVIII (February, 1968), 614-17.

Lynch, William F. "Confusion in Our Theatre." Thought, XVI (Autumn, 1951), 350-58.

Mueller, William R. "Tennessee Williams: A New Direction?" *The Christian Century*, LXXXI (October 14, 1964), 1271-72.

Nathan, George Jean. "*A Streetcar Named Desire*." *The Theatre Book of the Year, 1947-1948*. New York: Knopf, 1948, pp. 163-66.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. "Bonhoeffer's *Christologie* of 1933" in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*. Edited by Martin E. Marty. New York: Association Press, 1962, pp. 145-65.

Popkin, Henry. "The Plays of Tennessee Williams." *Tulane Drama Review*, IV (March, 1960)~~,~~ 45-64.

Reid, Desmond, "Tennessee Williams." *Studies* (Dublin, Ireland), XLVI (1957), 431-46.

Roberts, Preston T., Jr. "Bringing Pathos into Focus." *The University of Chicago Magazine*, XLVII (February, 1954), 7-11, 18.

Sagar, K. M. "What Mr. Williams Has Made of D. H. Lawrence." *Twentieth Century*, CLXVIII (August, 1960), 143-53.

Schorer, Mark. "Technique as Discovery" in *The Modern Critical Spectrum*. Edited by Gerald J. and Nancy M. Goldberg. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965, pp. 70-82.

Stavrow, Constantine, N. "The Neurotic Heroine in Tennessee Williams." *Literature and Psychology*, V (May, 1955), 26-34.

Szeliski, John Von. "Tennessee Williams and the Tragedy of Sensitivity." *Western Humanities Review*, XX (Summer, 1966), 203-11.

Tynan, Kenneth. "American Blues: The Plays of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams." *Encounter*, II (May, 1954), 13-19.

Vowles, Richard B. "Tennessee Williams and Strindberg." Modern Drama, I (December, 1958), 166-71.

________. "Tennessee Williams: The World of His Imagery." Tulane Drama Review, III (December, 1958), 51-56.

Young, Vernon. "Social Drama and Big Daddy." Southwest Review, XLI (Spring, 1956), 194-97.

C. Unpublished Materials

Conference on Literature and Theology. Emory University, November 16, 17 and 18, 1967. Personal notes of the Proceedings.

Hurley, Paul J. "Tennessee Williams: Critic of American Society." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1962.

Quirino, Leonard. "The Darkest Celebrations of Tennessee Williams: A Study of Battle of Angels, Orpheus Descending, A Streetcar Named Desire, Camino Real, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and Suddenly Last Summer." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Brown University, 1964.

Singh, Hari. "Streetcar: A Reinterpretation." Unpublished Manuscript, American Studies Research Center, Hyderabad, India, 1966.

Starcke, Walter. Letter to Delma Eugene Presley. September 4, 1967. Personal Copy.